Dialogue Between Communication & Theology
An Emerging Field of Communication Theology

Writings by Frances Forde Plude & Other Scholars

Edited by Christian Taske
Table of Contents

*Click on a title to read article.

I. Introduction

  1. A Listening Church: Communication And Collegiality In The Age Of Francis
  2. Theology And Digital Culture

II. Defining Communication Theology

  1. Communication Theology Information Sheet
  2. Communication Theology: A Personal View
  3. Moving Toward Communication Theology

III. Development of Communication Theology

  1. Religion And Mediated Popular Culture: The Need For Dialogue
  2. Interactive Communication In The Catholic Church
  3. Bridges Link Communication & Theology
  4. Communication Interactivity: A Sign Of The Times
  5. Biblical Storytelling In A Digital Age
  6. Communication Theology: Some Basics
  7. Communication Theology Status Report, June 2000
  8. Signis Report On Theology And Communication
  9. Reflections On The Papal Encyclical Process

IV. Dialogue with Theologians

  1. The Unavoidable Dialogue: 5 Interfaces Between Theology & Communication
  2. Conversation With Thomas Boomershine
  3. Female Theologians: They Are My Sisters
  4. Building A Synodal Church: With Communication Theology
  5. Heck Lecture, Presented At Union Theological Seminary In Dayton Ohio
  6. Communication Theology Questions

V. Global Conferences

  1. Introduction
  2. Cavalletti Conferences And Follow-Up Conferences
3. Cavalletti Conferences: History And Analysis
4. Seminars On Communication Theology Held At Conventions Of The Catholic Theological Society Of America (CTSA)
5. Summaries: Communication Theology Sessions At The Annual Convention Of The Catholic Theological Society Of America (CTSA)
6. Communication Studies: Bridging Gaps In Our Theology Metaphors
7. The Challenge Of Change In The Catholic Church
8. Beyond The Gutenberg Hologram: The Gamble Of A Lifetime
9. Communicative Theology: An Introduction
13. Ariccia Conference: List Of Participants & Topics
15. Ariccia Theology And Communication Conference, September 2007, Rome
16. Communication Theology Conferences In India
17. Chicago Meeting: Catholic Theological Union, September 25, 1999
18. International Study Commission On Media, Religion And Culture
19. Center For Media, Religion, And Culture At The University Of Colorado, College Of Media, Communication, And Information
20. The International Conferences On Media, Religion, And Culture
21. THEOCOM Conferences, Santa Clara University
22. Communication And Theology Conference: St. John’s University, September 16-18 (2008)
23. Fifth International Conference On Media, Religion & Culture: Mediating Religion In The Context Of Multicultural Tension

**VI. Practical Case Studies**

1. Building Dialogic Communities Of Faith: A Response To The Appeal For Dialogue From Pope Francis
2. A Dialogical Analysis Of Pope Benedict’s Visit To The U.S.
3. The U.S. Catholic Church Sexual Abuse Scandal: A Media/Religion Case Study
5. Connecting With The Human Spirit: The U.S. Catholic Sexual Abuse Scandal And The Internet Challenge For Global Churches
6. Communication Theology: Some Basics
7. Communication As A Basic Principle Of Theology
8. Communication As A Theological And Pastoral Challenge
9. Embodiment Of The Word: A Pastoral Approach To Scripture In A Digital Age
10. Communication Education For Seminarians And Theologians: Some Considerations
11. Challenges For Evangelization In The Digital Age
13. The Episcopal Conference In The Communications Marketplace: Issues And Challenges For Catholic Identity And Ecclesiology
14. Can Election-Campaign Technology Inspire Churches To Be More Interactive?

VII. Communicative Theology

1. Communicative Theology: A Brief Introduction
2. Communicative Theology
3. Communicative Theology: A Short Introduction
4. The Practice Of Communicative Theology: Introduction To A New Theological Culture
6. Theme-Centered Interactions (Tci): An Introduction
7. From ICT To TCI: Communicative Theology(Ies), Pedagogy And Web 2.0
8. Theme-Centered Interaction: Intersections With Reflective Practice In North American Religious Contexts
10. The Triume God: Source And Fundament Of Human Communication – A Sketch Of Communicative Theology
11. Communicative Theology & Students’ Digital Culture
12. Building The Listening Church Pope Francis Wants

VIII. Readings

1. A Communication/Theology Annotated Bibliography
2. Recent Work In Communication And Theology: A Report
3. Communication Theology: Sample Book Titles From Asia
4. Belief In Media: Cultural Perspectives On Media And Christianity
5. Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith In Digital Culture
7. Communication And Lonergan: Common Ground For Forging A New Age
8. The Church And Communication
9. Engaging Technology In Theological Education: All That We Can’t Leave Behind, Rowman And Littlefield, 2005
12. Mass Media And The Moral Imagination
13. Media, Culture And Catholicism
14. Communication And Theology: A Review Of The Literature
15. Communication Theology: A Sample Syllabus
17. Preface To The Volume The Bible And The Technology Of The Word, Jose Palakeel, Ed. In India
18. Communication Theology: Resource Sheet
I. Introduction
A Listening Church: Communication And Collegiality In The Age Of Francis

By Frances Forde Plude

[This essay was a cover story in America magazine, April 4-11, 2016.]

LENDING AN EAR. Pope Francis listens to a woman while greeting the disabled during his general audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican on March 11.

How does the center of institutional authority—in the Catholic Church, the papacy, and the Vatican—allow dialogue within a global, decentralized, talk-back culture? The answer is: with great difficulty.

Pope Francis’ open and friendly communication style has stirred interest globally, especially among communication-study specialists. Much attention has been focused on his personal style in communications, but he is also developing and implementing a new style of communications within the church itself. When the pope urged candid discussions at the recent assemblies of the Synod of Bishops on the family, it was interesting to see how this worked and where it proved challenging among church leaders.

There were two types of challenges visible in the synod: negotiating the content divisions—the arguments over the theological material at hand and the decisions to be made—and dealing with
the processes set up to facilitate healthy dialogue. While the discussions over content, especially about Communion for the divorced and remarried, received the most global media attention, the way the dialogue itself worked was at least as fascinating. This is not surprising, because process issues are basic to facilitating fruitful dialogue. Much valuable theory and practice already exist to aid the institution in establishing authentic dialogue. But the system resists.

The issue is this: How does a tradition of centralized hierarchy interact with and communicate effectively in a decentralized digital world? This devolution of power is a current challenge for many centralized organizations and power structures globally, as Moisés Naím has explained expertly in *The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States*.

When he spoke to the bishops on his trip to the United States, Pope Francis spoke of a “culture of encounter” in which “dialogue is our method.” He recognizes that whatever challenges may be encountered in official, centralized communications, there is a deeper and more basic level at which communication—in the sense of dialogue and encounter—is at the heart of the church’s mission to carry the message of the Gospel to the world.

While the recent synod meetings provided plenty of evidence of difficulties with, and even occasional resistance to, this commitment to dialogue and encounter, Pope Francis was not deterred. He showed patience at synod sessions. This patience is motivated, it seems, by a long view of how the process of dialogue within the church needs to develop.

The pope has said that the church should not be run like a top-down organization, with all authority and power radiating from the center; he said it should be an “inverted pyramid” in which the bishops and pope exercise their authority and deepen their identification with Jesus “in serving the people of God.” In his address marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, the pope made clear the church should not just hold synods; it should become synodal. He said that the Second Vatican Council’s hope for “the spirit of episcopal collegiality has not yet been fully realized,” and he urged a “healthy decentralization” away from Rome.

Indeed, these challenges are not new. Over 30 years ago, while attending a conference on communication and theology, I had a lovely lunch in a quaint Italian village with three respected theologians, one each from France, Germany, and the United States. Fueled by a glass of Italian wine, I asked them, “What is the key challenge facing the Catholic Church today?” They answered virtually in unison: “truly listening to the local church.”

The three decades since have seen a significant development of resources in communication and theology that can help to facilitate a synodal church. Here are a few examples:
• Eight international meetings have been held linking communication studies to moral theology, ecclesiology, and other areas of theology.

• For a decade, an annual seminar was held at the convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America so theologians and communication specialists could interact and think together.

• European Catholic funding supported a small international ecumenical commission to meet annually for a decade on various continents to think together with local leaders about media, religion, and culture.

• For years the U.S. bishops’ conference and the Vatican have sponsored seminars at Santa Clara University allowing theology and communication experts to push these ideas further.

• A document called “A Communication and Theology Resource Kit” has been produced, collecting key writings to date.

As valuable as all these resources are, however, the larger challenge is to implement these ideas at the parish and diocesan level so the life of the church can be enriched by more dialogue, drawing in the gifts of the people of God beyond the hierarchy, of women and other laypeople. This has already been demonstrated in Europe where Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath have developed a project, documented in The Practice of Communicative Theology, involving workshops that attracted hundreds of church members.

According to one participant, “experimenting with, and reflecting on, group processes that promote personal and collective discernment and decision-making in the church... they have developed a theologically integrated approach to group communicative practices.” Similar workshops could easily be organized regionally in the United States. Another example is the practice of local diocesan synods, such as the one conducted in 2014 in the Diocese of Bridgeport, Conn., discussed at length by Bishop Frank Caggiano in an interview published on America’s website (“Church Reform From Below,” 7/27/14).

One insight emerging from all this work is that churches, for centuries, have used various communication channels as instruments of conversion. Now, however, communication and computer technologies have merged into global dialogic networks. Individuals, groups, and cultures have become mediated—totally suffused by a global media ecosystem. Churches have found their one-way messages are not being heard or valued either internally or externally, especially by young people. Desperate individuals and leaders have not been listening
appreciatively to each other; gridlock has spread. William Isaacs, who wrote *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, says that in most dialogues, “we don’t listen; we just reload.”

Pope Francis has spoken out against “a hermeneutic of suspicion” or “hostile rigidity.” In his encyclical “Laudato Si” he used the word *dialogue* 25 times.

Communication theory and practice are keys to the church’s future success. Digital communication technologies are an essential part of the infrastructure of connection, but they can be used effectively only if the church learns how to integrate dialogue and listening at the heart of its structures of authority. This is especially important as talk proceeds about decentralization. It is also critical if “the people of God,” predominantly at the level of local churches, are to be deeply involved in this renewal.

The pope reminded the bishops at the synod: “I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly.” The whole church needs to hear that encouragement as well...
Theology And Digital Culture

A Reflective Essay by Frances Forde Plude

Over the centuries churches have invested heavily in many different media – oral storytelling, manuscripts of the scriptures (and church tradition), scriptoria and libraries, print publications, and an extraordinary educational system bringing literacy to billions. In the 20th century, the Catholic Church early recognized the life-altering impact of film, issued several communication documents, and had Popes who became media icons.

During past centuries churches focused primarily on using these media as channels for “the message” as an evangelizing tool. Now, in the 21st century, seductive entertainment stories, computerized social networks, and a ‘talk-back’ digital reality, require a new kind of a church/communication strategy to strengthen traditional measures. Computer and communication technologies have merged into huge but highly personalized networks. These webs of relationships and interactivity are new challenges for church ministries.

- We understand better now how audiences interpret media messages. Meanings are constructed interactively. It is clear an audience’s understanding of a message’s meaning may differ from what the originators intended. Church leaders must be schooled to be more acutely aware of this.

- Multimedia and multi-sensorial communication challenge print- and text-based transmission and the producer-centered construction of meanings. There are many new ways of communicating today. Media are no longer considered simply instruments of transmission; media are integral to the meaning and construction of culture.

- Popular culture – individualized, interactive, and often ideological – captivates huge audiences globally. Today’s religious leaders must be re-schooled in the cultural aspects of our media work.

- In the past churches have often used writing as a means of democratization and peace. In the digital age, churches must oppose using media for the secularization of culture, violence, and control by commercial/military forces. This is a reason not to remain wedded to communication systems of the past; rather, we need to make digital communications an integral part of worship, education, social action, and spiritual formation. The absence of churches from the forces shaping the development of digital communications leaves a huge void in the emerging global culture of the digital age.
Churches have been concerned with the truthfulness of their message, depending upon the Holy Spirit for the message to take root in human souls. Now religious leaders face a ‘talk-back’ mediated world. Churches need to respect this dialogue and re-tool their communication-training efforts to prepare church officials, both technically and psychologically, to engage in *genuine dialogue* with these diverse new media.

A new digital communication system and a new way of training church- and communication-leaders for this digital reality must emerge and mature in the 21st century.

*[These concepts are diagramed and elaborated upon in the following Figures 1-4.]
4 GRIDS Showing Development of Interactive Communication Systems

Figure 1

**Centralized Periods**
Constructed by Frances Forde Plude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feudal society</td>
<td>oral traditions</td>
<td>Catholic Church’s association with medieval culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monarchy</td>
<td>art in culture</td>
<td>monasticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crusades</td>
<td>monastery scriptoria</td>
<td>cathedrals dominate village squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thomism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reformation</td>
<td>printing</td>
<td>Catholic Church’s unified/central authority threatened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rise of Middle Class</td>
<td>books become a commodity</td>
<td>other sectors experience their voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enlightenment</td>
<td>letters of correspondence</td>
<td>a secular society, philosophy and science assault religious authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revolutions (France, U.S.)</td>
<td>posters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schools emerge</td>
<td>telegraph and telephone</td>
<td>Catholic Church social theory supports workers after many years of labor strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Revolution</td>
<td>penny press emerges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steam engines encourage travel</td>
<td>rails link geographic areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bureaucracies increase</td>
<td>elevators, skyscrapers, telephones encourage organizational structures</td>
<td>churches increase their own bureaucratic structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much centralized economic and political power</td>
<td>mass media grow/concentrate</td>
<td>Pius IX <em>Syllabus of Errors</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o banks/financial systems</td>
<td>newspapers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o colonial empires</td>
<td>o magazines for large audiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o nation-states clash in two global wars</td>
<td>o radio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o large television networks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o cinema</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>churches see media as a way of evangelizing mass audiences (spreading the word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o church publishing grows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o TV and radio ministries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o centralized unified voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o large audiences stressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 2: Development of Interactive Communication Systems

**Decentralized Phases (1960s To Date)**

*Constructed by Frances Forde Plude*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• liberation movements</td>
<td>• group media</td>
<td>• Vatican II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o social structures under siege</td>
<td>o structures for group support</td>
<td>“people of God” view emerges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o feminism</td>
<td>o base communities</td>
<td>emphasis on local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o civil rights</td>
<td>o telephone support</td>
<td>church/vernacular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o gay rights</td>
<td>groups (A.A.,</td>
<td>o development of national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o sexual revolution</td>
<td>bereavement support,</td>
<td>bishop conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o ecology/green revolution</td>
<td>women’s groups)</td>
<td>o increasing laity roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o growth of choice/options</td>
<td></td>
<td>defined but not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cybernetics/systems theory</td>
<td>• mass media threatened by</td>
<td>implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o new social management</td>
<td>cable/VCRs/individual</td>
<td>• large numbers of clergy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tools</td>
<td>satellite feeds</td>
<td>religious leave vowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o new decision-making styles</td>
<td>national newspapers and</td>
<td>congregations and dioceses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pyramid management</td>
<td>magazines cut back;</td>
<td>• co-responsibility concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structures/hierarchies are under</td>
<td>specialized journals and local</td>
<td>develops with parish/diocesan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pressure in social institutions</td>
<td>press expand</td>
<td>councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• newsletters multiply with</td>
<td>• theologians argue against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>electronic publishing and</td>
<td>excessive central control by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>email</td>
<td>Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• political/social organizations</td>
<td>• computers merge with</td>
<td>• central authority of Roman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threatened, somewhat</td>
<td>communication</td>
<td>Catholic church feels under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paralyzed, by “tyranny of many</td>
<td>o people interconnected</td>
<td>siege again (like at the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small minorities”</td>
<td>horizontally (like</td>
<td>Reformation) and gets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• corporations decentralize</td>
<td>telephones earlier)</td>
<td>defensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Soviet Union begins to break</td>
<td>• media/information overload</td>
<td>• liberation theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apart</td>
<td>assaults individual and</td>
<td>• charismatic movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>institutional effectiveness</td>
<td>• polarization within churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Vatican II impetus slows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• liberation theology</td>
<td>• few people enter religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• celibacy for priests is</td>
<td>orders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>questioned</td>
<td>• laity frustrated by limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• women’s ordination movement</td>
<td>voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• growing number of Christians</td>
<td>• celibacy for priests is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in Asia, Africa, Latin America</td>
<td>questioned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Corporations, Soviet Union, and some communication technologies are under pressure.*
Figure 3: Development of Interactive Communication Systems

Growth of Dialogic Theory and Structures
Constructed by Frances Forde Plude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • increasing numbers of global mechanisms / cooperation / treaties to solve global issues (ecology, famine, fishing, trade tariffs) | • increasing use of intra-group media/messaging  
  o answering machines  
  o computers  
  o fax  
  o email  
  o mobile radio/phones  
  o paging systems  
  o teleconferencing | • increasing strength of local and ethnic theologies  
  o national bishop conferences  
  o priest-personnel senates  
  o women asserting themselves; vowed religious congregations restructure  
  o language pressured to move beyond gender  
  o liturgical varieties |
| • European Union and other regional consortia formed | • need to coordinate media due to overload of information sources and content | • growing awareness that prayer (contemplative, charismatic) is widely practiced among laity, not just professed religious |
| • collaborative legal structures struggle to get born (space law, international technical standardization) | • convergence of media | • collectives of theologians organize joint statements |
| • glasnost/end of Cold War | • concentration/cross-ownership of media companies | • growing attention to global poverty and justice issues |
| • Eastern European democracies struggle politically/economically | • digital technology begins to replace analog modes | • voice of the churches somewhat muted due to their own strife |
| • increasing use of U.N | • need to coordinate media due to overload of information sources and content | • churches called upon to move beyond internal divisions to offer the world a moral, spiritual collaborative vision |
| • emergence of term “World Order” | • global attempts to establish communication links  
  o domain addresses encourage internet use  
  o copyright protection of intellectual property becomes a concern  
  o privacy issues emerge | • wars emerge from lack of negotiation and unified world order mechanisms |
| • Berlin wall falls and unites Germany | | • a struggle to be truly collaborative among nations |
| | | • strong nation-state presence (U.S./U.K./Europe, etc.) remains |
| | | • UN role shows need for more formal, institutionalized collaborative mechanisms |
Figure 4: Development of Interactive Communication Systems

A Postmodern View
Constructed by Frances Forde Plude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • increasing globalization  
  • increasing ethnic clashes with national boundaries and nearby states  
  • growing numbers of immigrants and refugees flowing over borders  
  • sociologists identify the reality of ‘the project of the self’: autonomous and reflexive | • continuing breakdown of large network audiences within U.S. and other countries  
  o cable diversification  
  o global satellite broadcasts  
  o VCR transmission systems  
  • news broadcasts become more interactive and argumentative  
  • increasing popularity of talk-back  
  • cell phone used for audio/video  
  • computer miniaturization/growth  
  • blogs, websites like MySpace project self-narratives | • established religious groups struggle to adapt to rapid technology change, growing liberation movements and a culture of talking back  
  • media-literacy movement (in schools and churches) contributes to media awareness and some media-bashing  
  • global attention to sex- and cover-up scandals within Catholic Church; leadership crisis emerges  
  • gradual awareness of ‘a generation of seekers’ (after spirituality) |
| • world-wide AIDS epidemic  
  • negotiation theorists and practitioners attempt to resolve difficulties  
  • growing use of peacekeeping forces  
  • increasing global terrorism and attack on U.S. World Trade Center  
  • growing use of U.S. unilateral power (Iraq, etc.)  
  • Middle East war erupts with increased use of suicide bombers  
  • increased outsourcing of labor  
  • climate change awareness | • WWW and internet use developed cyberspace network world with increased use of motion video  
  • changes occur in personal communication habits  
  • system-wide communication in corporations and politics changes  
  • wireless technology allows on-the-spot dialogic networks  
  • music videos and video disks make entertainment product more mobile  
  • CDs, DVDs and iPods permit video and audio downloading and piracy  
  • Al Jazeera news network gives a systematic voice to the Arab world | • churches and media researchers become aware that audience reception is key; it is individualized and sometimes rebellious  
  • pluralism and ambiguity  
  • hermeneutics voices issue of cultural interpretation  
  • communication is re-defined by some as cultural mediation  
  • growing visibility of fundamentalist movements  
  • tensions rise as growth of Christianity and Islam explodes in Africa, Asia, Latin America |
II. Defining Communication Theology
Communication Theology Information Sheet

Developed by Rev. “Bob” Bonnot

Theology is faith seeking understanding. This is always done from a given position and with a defined perspective. This has given rise to various ‘schools’ of theology.

- **Augustinian Theology** – positioned in Platonism with a Roman/Biblical perspective
- **Thomistic Theology** – positioned in Aristotelianism with a Patristic perspective
- **Counter-Reformation Theology** – positioned within the Reformation with a defensive and legalistic perspective
- **Liberation Theology** – positioned among oppressed people with a perspective of the dignity of the human person with rights including freedom and justice
- **Feminist Theology** – positioned within woman’s experience with a perspective that critiques male-dominated interpretations of theology, history, and culture

In this context, Communication Theology, in the Catholic perspective as conditioned by Vatican II, is doing theology:

- from a position within today’s culture defined by communication/digital emphases
- from a perspective that seeks to understand the divine Presence and action in the varied dimensions of this communication and digital culture

Communication Theology sees various cultural forms (music, image, symbol, ritual, etc.) as modalities of communication, as mediations of culture through communication.

**The Theologian’s Task**

Theologians wishing to “do” Communication Theology may:

1. attend to the communication dimension of their specific theological discipline,
2. focus on the interpretive dynamics involved in communicating the fruit of their theological reflection effectively to today’s public which resides in an electronic culture,
3. or theologians might choose to position themselves within a communication-studies culture and elaborate a theology (an understanding of God, God’s presence, and God’s action) that arises from that communication-culture base.

Thus, Communication Theology uses a methodology that focuses on communication modalities as experienced and understood within today’s electronic culture.
Communication Theology: A Personal View

By Frances Forde Plude

This essay served as an Introduction to the December 2003 Theology Issue of the Catholic International Journal. I was Editor of this issue, featuring several other articles on Communication Theology.

September 11, 2001 was a tragic reminder that media are an integral part of ‘the ground of our being.’ It was not just the pictures; perhaps, more importantly, it is the fact that we continue to process our deeply religious beliefs and feelings (and fears) within a mediated culture and as part of a media-linked world community.

As many documents in this Catholic International Journal demonstrate, our culture is digital and we face the challenge of ‘being church’ in this new environment. Tom Boomershine notes in his essay that this is perhaps the first time in the history of Christianity that churches have not been an integral part of the major communication system of the age. (In contrast, churches used print technology empowered millions through their educational institutions.)

Overview of Topics

The Communication/Theology challenge is being processed currently both in theory and ‘on the ground.’ This issue reflects both phases of this action. Section I presents serious theological reflection as individuals – both theologians and communication scholars – begin to construct theoretical frameworks for a new field of thought: Communication Theology.

Section II isolates a ‘case study’ – the communication concept of dialogue as it relates to the Vatican II theology of communio. By examining the challenge of becoming a more dialogic church (in the light of an interactive world), the papers in this section demonstrate that the content of Communication Theology includes mass media issues, but many other communication concepts as well.

In Section III we report additional specific practical examples of how the integration of media and religion is being constructed by dedicated individuals in different arenas. This includes: several bishops struggling with pastoral realities; a woman helping people of faith write Hollywood scripts that are both entertaining and positive; two individuals who have worked hard to get Catholics to value film culture; a diocesan communication director who gives advice about dealing openly with media; an analysis of how church media training programs are changing (and what we can learn here from Latin America); a report on the development of a cable TV religious collaborative that has morphed into an entertainment company with wholesome
program goals; and some newsletter columns that attempt to explore how Communication Theology ideas can work at the parish level.

Sections IV and V offer additional voices addressing Communication Theology concepts and some resources for those who want to join this movement or simply find out more about it.

This issue includes both theory and praxis; it also reflects the global players and helpful resources. The Asian bishops, for example, are struggling with new media attitudes reported in Peter Malone’s paper. The interest in Communication Theology is somewhat ecumenical and that is reflected here.

A Personal Testimony

My own commitment to Communication Theology and its development has grown out of more than thirty years of work at the church- and-communication cause. While I have been engaged in other tasks (work as a TV producer, doctoral studies at Harvard, an academic career), I have been active as a player and consultant as churches have struggled with the growing challenge of a mediated culture and rapid technological change.

I have emerged from this experience strongly convinced that churches will not figure out how to adapt to this reality (and will not commit the necessary financial resources to it), until we have done the work of articulating theologically what is happening in our communication culture.

In working with theologians for more than a decade I can report they are unanimous in acknowledging the importance and necessity of this task. The problem is they are not equipped, right now, to doing it. Our reports from the Catholic Theological Society of America seminars on Communication Theology show that the conversation between theologians and communication scholars and practitioners has begun and continues. Much more interaction is necessary in the struggle to build the theoretical frameworks necessary to support (and to learn from), the work in the practical arenas. Here I am reminded of the statement: “There is nothing as practical as good theory.”

It should be noted some colleagues do not see ‘Communication Theology’ as an appropriate rubric. These thoughtful issues have been raised:

- The term ‘Communication Theology’ seems to make communication derivative of Theology – perhaps subverting attempts to engage media as a critical cultural perspective; this perspective is often called mediation.
• It is possible that Communication Theology can be used to protect power and legitimacy “rather than being about fundamental normative definitions and concepts.” Stewart Hoover has suggested what is needed is “a relationship between theology and communication that is nuanced, historical, critical, and engaged.”

• It has been noted that some theologians and “all culturally-minded forms of theologizing” are already doing this; all theologians of culture begin with this affirmation.

What remains worrisome, however, is that one colleague reports he did a survey recently of ten theological texts on theology and culture and found only one even mentioned communication media! So, for such integration to occur it seems that some systematic attempts must be organized; what this effort is labeled seems almost to be a secondary issue.

**Theoretical-Framework Examples**

Father “Bob” Bonnot has put the issue succinctly. He notes that theology is faith, seeking understanding. This is always done from a given position and with a defined perspective. This has given rise to various ‘schools’ of theology:

- **Augustinian Theology** positioned in Platonism with a Roman/Biblical perspective
- **Thomistic Theology** positioned in Aristotelianism with a Patristic perspective
- **Counter-Reformation Theology** positioned within the Reformation with a defensive and legalistic perspective

In our own day we have seen the “option for the poor” and the need to include women’s experience articulated within liberation and feminist theologies.

In this context, Communication Theology, within the Catholic perspective as conditioned by Vatican II, is doing theology:

- from a position within today’s culture which is defined by communication emphases,
- with a perspective that seeks to understand the Divine Presence and action in the varied dimensions of this communication culture.

In other words, Communication Theology sees various cultural forms (music, image, symbol, ritual, etc.) as *modalities of communication*, as *mediations of culture through communication*.

Organizing material within Communication Theology is a challenge. Theology and communication are huge fields already; how does one integrate them? In 1982 Dr. Jim McDonnell proposed one schema in a bibliography he prepared for the Center for the Study of
Communication and Culture, located in London at that time. Here is a partial list of the categories he suggested under “communication perspectives in theology.”

- Theological Method: (Communicative Theology; Narrative Theology)
- Meaning, Interpretation and Truth
- Religious and Theological Language
- Theology and Culture: (Religious Experience and Imagination; Divine Self-Communication; Faith and Imagination)
- Art, Music, Literature, and the Religious Imagination
- Fundamental Theology
- Ecclesiology
- Bible and Biblical History

Such theoretical frameworks can provide maps for the Communication Theology journey ahead of us. Daniel Felton, in his Gregorian University dissertation, developed five thoughtful interfaces linking Theology and Communication studies. The Felton framework includes: Theology and Communication; Communitive Theology; Systematic Theology of Communication; Pastoral Theology of Communication; and Christian Moral Vision of Communication.

It is a challenge for Communication Theology to mature, as younger theologians emerge from, and reside in, the digital age.
Moving Toward Communication Theology

By Frances Forde Plude

[This was published in Media Development, Vol LVIII, March 2011.]

In a transborder world we are challenged to integrate intellectual arenas that have long been their own isolated ‘turfs.’ This paper reflects upon interfaces among media, religion, and culture. I examine how theology may be reconstituted as these three areas interact and evolve. I propose that theology is enriched when suffused by communication studies and I cite specific trends emerging. We might view the theological enterprise through a communication/culture lens, helping us to see many dimensions of theology in new ways.¹

In a heavily mediated culture, communication studies can play a central role as a systematic hermeneutical principle as theology evolves within today’s digital culture. This suggests that, under the rubric of hermeneutics, Communication Theology brings a distinct perspective from a defined position to the theological enterprise. Communication studies (including media, but not limited to media), works it systematically as an interpretive principle.²

I am sharing here the growth of analytical frameworks currently helping theologians to engage communication studies (more systematically than in the past), as they elaborate the conceptual meaning of faith. This also allows communication and cultural studies scholars to engage with the perspectives of theologians. Such engagement can help theological insights inform and enhance a digital culture rather than appearing to be anachronistic within the culture. I also offer specific examples of the growth of Communication Theology content, methodologies, and some concerns and difficulties as we look through this lens or engage communication as a hermeneutical principle. Finally, I offer a few recommendations based upon a decade of theological engagement and several additional decades of both theory and practice in the church-and-communication field.

Theology Perspectives

Theology is faith, seeking understanding. This is generally done from a given position and with a defined perspective. This has given rise to various ‘schools’ of theology.³ Augustinian Theology was positioned in Platonism with a Roman/biblical perspective. Thomistic Theology’s

¹ The use of the lens metaphor was suggested in conversation with Jane Redmont, a contributor to the development of Communication Theology.
³ I am grateful to Rev. Bernard Bonnot for articulating these perspectives. Some of his work appears in New Theology Review (February 1996).
perspective was Aristotelian, with a patristic perspective. Counter-Reformation Theology was positioned within the Reformation with a perspective that was defensive and legalistic.

In recent times Liberation Theology has positioned itself among oppressed people; its perspective values the dignity of the human person, with rights including freedom and justice. And Feminist Theology’s position has moved within women’s experiences with a perspective that critiques male-dominated interpretations of theology, history, and culture.

In this context, Communication Theology is defined as viewing theology from a position within today’s culture, a culture largely ruled by digital communication emphases. This perspective seeks to understand the divine presence and action in the varied dimensions of this communication culture. Communication Theology sees various cultural forms (music, image, symbol, ritual, etc.) as modalities of communication, as mediations of culture through communication and digital technologies.

Theologians wishing to reflect upon Communication Theology may:

1. attend to communication dimensions of their specific theological discipline; or
2. focus on the interpretive dynamics involved in communicating the fruit of their theological reflection effectively to today’s public which resides in an electronic culture; or
3. choose to position themselves within a communication-studies culture and elaborate a theology (an understanding of God, God’s presence, and God’s action) that arises from that communication/culture base.

There are interesting ways this can unfold. The theologian Francis Sullivan, S.J. sees ecumenism, historically, as a communication exercise. Years ago Avery Dulles, S.J. stated: “The Church is communication.” The broad issue of Christ and culture was examined thoroughly by H. Richard Neibuhr in the early fifties. Walter Ong, S.J wrote a number of years ago about media and the state of theology in the journal Cross Currents, an essay which appears as a chapter of the book Media, Culture and Catholicism, edited by Paul Soukup, S.J. Another significant example is a

5 See A. Dulles, ‘The Church and Communications,’ in The Reshaping of Catholicism (Harper & Row, 1988) for a more complete development of the communicative thought of Dulles.
7 See also: B.E. Gronbeck, T.J. Farrell, P.A. Soukup Media, Consciousness and Culture: Explorations on Walter Ong’s Thoughts (Sage) and W. Ong, P.A. Soukup, T.J. Farrell, Faith and Contexts, Volumes 1, 2 and 3 (Scholars Press, 1992).
book by theologian Richard Gaillardetz entitled *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture*.  

If we imagine circles of theology, popular mediated culture, and pastoral communities of faith, we can see they are *already* overlapping. However, from a Communication Theology perspective, they are moving more and more on *top* of each other – becoming ‘one big set of things.’

Some of the methodological issues within Communication Theology are:

- acknowledging experience as a theological resource and criterion
- reading texts (especially communication/culture/media texts) in revisioning ways
- utilizing the hermeneutic of both suspicion and retrieval
- seeking mutuality in communication forums
- critiquing language issues (across continents and gender).

As mentioned above, some theologians have *already* touched seriously upon communication concepts. Härting asked what it means for theology that communication is constitutive in the mystery of God. Lonergan’s eighth functional specialty is communication. David Tracy deals with communication and culture. Some feel that *all* of theology is communication; this view tends to be voiced by communication specialists rather than theologians. However, theologians have not *systematically* re-conceptualized theology in the light of communication studies (as they have done in Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology). How can this literature and pastoral activity be supported?

I suggest we include a wide range of communication theory and practice in Communication Theology and not limit ourselves solely to mass media studies or cultural studies. For example, most communication theory courses cover *structural and functional theories* of communication, rooted in the organization of language and social systems. *Cognitive and behavioral communication theories*, coming out of psychology, focus on the individual. Another genre, *interpretive theories* of communication, includes phenomenology and hermeneutics. A fourth genre would be *critical theories* of communication with their commentaries on society and social

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9 When Jerome Weisner, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, wanted to convince supporters of the need for a Media Lab at MIT, he used three similar circles, explaining that computers, cable/broadcast TV and telephony were merging into ‘one big set of things.’ The famed Media Lab was thus created and MIT planned for another Media Lab in India.

10 This is the view of Franz-Josef Eilers who has published numerous communication and culture books and is a noted church communication specialist. My concern is that, while viewing all of theology as communication *is* desirable, even appropriate, this is *not* the perception of most theologians or the public. It would be helpful if all theology incorporated gender awareness also, but it has taken the articulation of feminist theologians to move toward this. Perhaps communication theologians can help us accomplish the total integration Eilers articulates.
practice, like Marxism and feminism. Finally, there are interactional theories of communication – viewing social life as a process of interactions. I am personally comfortable in this last category, because of my interest in dialogic communication and the reality of interactive technologies like the telephone, computer networks, the Internet, the World Wide Web and individualized media like blogs, My Space, and similar talk-back forums.

The terms ‘media’ or ‘mass media’ refer to only a small segment of the field of communication studies. I believe the interactions among media, religion, and culture can be enriched by a theological renewal that systematically integrates insights from among the many different genres of communication theory – all of communication studies and not just media studies.

This statement springs from my own doctoral studies at Harvard and M.I.T., and from several decades of personal experience in the areas of commercial television, work in church communication, and a position in the academic world – as well as a number of years working at the Communication Theology task. I realize the whole field of communication studies introduces a broad perspective; it may seem difficult at times to focus. However, the richness of this communication-studies breadth can match the broad scope of theology specialties.

Theologians are a research and development resource for churches – a sort of ‘think tank’ where new models and paradigms are conceived and constructed. The Second Vatican Council occurred in the Catholic Church primarily because creative theologians were re-thinking concepts in the decades before the Council. And even as the bishops met during the Council sessions, each evening in Rome – over wine and pasta – the theologians were goading the bishops into bold new statements about religious liberty, about the church in the modern world, about biblical understandings and the renewal of worship. This is an example of the practical impact of theological interaction that is both creative and sound.

Personally, I do not think we will ever get most congregations, church leaders, seminaries or the academy to value and utilize the rich resources of communication studies (or even media studies) into their thinking and practice until we have integrated many facets of communication studies into theology. It will be most helpful if theologians themselves systematically conceptualize such integration – a dynamic Communication Theology arising from inside theology.

This deep and widespread theological integration has not taken place widely even where there are fine religious training programs in communication studies. Graduates of theological programs of study acquire knowledge of the communication field. However, they return to their localities and find the theology and practice of their religious institutions view communication (mass media and digital culture, in particular) as something apart from church policy, religious experience and theology.
Liberation Theology, as a case in point, proves there are very practical consequences when theological thought inflames practice at the grassroots level and when, in return, this real-world experience transforms theology. Solid classics written in the field of Liberation Theology have articulated principles that could not be ignored either in seminaries or in senate chambers.

Feminist Theology also represents a vital revision of the fundamental themes and methods of theology. Of course, not all theologians or church leaders are comfortable with these new fields. However, as the theorizing and literature mature and the grassroots action continues, creative development occurs in theology, in religious institutions and in pastoral practice.

**Communication Theology: A Partial Chronology**

A series of seminars sponsored by the Gregorian University in Rome began over two decades ago and provided one foundation for Communication Theology development. Every two years theologians and communication and cultural studies scholars and practitioners came together for a week of reflection. These seminars focused on fundamental theology, philosophy, moral theology, ecclesiology, religious film, and popular culture – always reflecting on these topics through a theological/communication/cultural studies lens. The U.S. publisher Sheed and Ward issued these volumes, along with other titles,11 in their Communication, Culture and Theology series.

Another contribution has been a series of symposia held annually for almost a decade at the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA). With the support of CTSA and the U.S. Association of Catholic Communicators, Father Bob Bonnot and I have coordinated these sessions, held each year at the CTSA convention. In each seminar a major theologian addressed a topic and other theologians and communication experts interacted. A pre-planning session was sometimes held four or five months before the convention. A small group of theologians and communicators would gather to help the CTSA presenter-theologian see his or her topic’s varied interfaces with communication studies.

These CTSA convention sessions have addressed issues like: ‘Narrative and Communication Theology in a Post-literate Culture;’ ‘The Mystery and Task of Self-Communication in Trinitarian Theology;’ ‘The Theology of Preaching;’ ‘New Models of Reception Theory,’ and ‘Music as Theology in a Digital Age.’

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11 In addition to the books mentioned within this chapter, the Sheed and Ward Communication, Culture and Theology series includes titles such as *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-figures in Film; New Image of Religious Film; From One Medium to Another: Communicating the Bible Through Multimedia*; and *Communicating Christ to the World*. The series, re-named “The Communication, Culture and Religion Series” is now published by Rowman and Littlefield. Recent titles include: *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can’t Leave Behind; Seeking Goodness and Beauty: The Use of the Arts in Theological Ethics*; and *Communication, Media, and Identity: A Christian Theory of Communication.*
So there have been on-going symposia in various locales including Rome and within a major theology professional association in the U.S.

Another important component of a developing Communication Theology consists of programs of study that integrate theology and communication studies. Examples are the Gregorian University and the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome. Pierre Babin’s program in France trained more than a thousand pastoral agents from 110 different countries and conducted over 500 sessions in Africa, South America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. There are programs at the University of Edinburgh and in London and programs established in Asia. Rev. Joseph Palakeel heads an innovative Communication Theology project that includes seminary course work, pastoral practice, and training programs in India.  

In the U.S., Ohio has seen two programs in Dayton. The Pastoral Communication and Ministry program at the University of Dayton has grown under the leadership of Sister Angela Ann Zukowski. And the graduate program in media and ministry, developed by Tom Boomershine at United Theological Seminary trained many individuals. Slowly there is a developing interest among other academic institutions in Communication Theology. I have taught Communication Theology at Notre Dame College in Cleveland. A creative syllabus on “Christianity and Communications in Contemporary Culture” was developed by Tom Boomershine for United Theological Seminary students in Dayton. And Sister Angela Ann Zukowski has taught Communication Theology both in the U.S. and abroad, both in person and online. It is certainly appropriate to develop this type of course material for international online delivery. And linked Websites could systematically share Communication Theology materials for easy global access.

An encouraging development is that a growing number of graduate and doctoral students in theology at various international institutions are linking together online for dialogue as they take courses and select research topics looking more and more like Communicative Theology. These inquiries are coming out of theological programs of study, rather than from the communication field. This is a significant breakthrough; it may indicate a sea change in theological studies. Much of this work is being done by a new generation of theologians who will impact this field – renewing it – as they mature into productive scholars and practitioners. Here is a partial list of research areas I have seen under discussion online:

- media education in religious congregations of women; spirituality and communications; case studies of mainline church involvement in electronic communication; the development of religious media theory in communication studies; biblical faith and cultural change; worship and the arts; pastoral practices

12 For details of these programs, see http://www.theologicon.org/html/uniqueprogram.htm; http://www.theologicon.org/html/courses_training.htm.

13 One such group formed during the Third International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture at the University of Edinburgh in 1999.
for the new digital culture; communication and religious conversion among refugees; liturgy as communication and narrative theology.

Communication Theology Case Studies

It will be helpful to cite other writings or projects that seem to me to be taking us toward Communication Theology. The first three are examples of theologians reaching out quite deliberately toward the riches of communication and cultural studies. And the fourth, the Common Ground project in the U.S., represents a dialogic process that borrows heavily from communication studies.

The work of theologian Robert Schreiter has forged a bold integration of theology and communication and cultural studies. Schreiter, who served as President of the Catholic Theological Society of America, attended many of the Communicative Theology seminars we organized at CTSA. He notes:

There has been an important shift in perspective in theology in recent years. …much more attention is now being paid to how … circumstances shape the response to the gospel… (This) shift in perspective… first became evident in regions where Christianity was relatively new … in parts of Africa and Asia. There was a growing sense that the theologies being inherited from the older churches of the North Atlantic community did not fit well into these quite different cultural circumstances.¹⁴

In several of his recent books, Schreiter reflects on various aspects of communication: codes; cross-cultural communication; intercultural communication flows; intercultural hermeneutics; semiotics of culture; and new technologies.

In his departing presidential address at CTSA, Schreiter focused on the development of doctrine in a world church. He spoke of a shift of the epistemological axis from a propositional format to Revelation as event or encounter. He noted we are moving from an egocentric to a sociocentric church. Schreiter mentioned a specific challenge – that emerging communication technologies represent a new opportunity to be dialogical and theological within local cultures.

Another Communication Theologian has been an inspiration for me personally for many years. Thomas Boomershine has ministered in New York City and is a respected biblical scholar – a professor for many years at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. More than anyone I know, Tom Boomershine articulates urgently that ‘changes in communication systems have been directly correlated with periods of major change in churches… (Churches) have entered into

(each) culture and mastered the new communication technology of the age, often being the leaders in the culture in appropriating and developing that technology.  

At a religious education meeting in California (held in the shadow of the Walt Disney and Hollywood enterprises), Boomershine reminded us that Jesus used oral culture, the early church appropriated Hellenistic written culture, and churches appropriated print culture (printing bibles, building educational institutions to empower people with literacy). However, he notes that today’s electronic culture is completely dominated by corporate enterprises and churches remain often outside of this digital culture. Even worse, churches seem unaware of the cause of their ineffectiveness. Instead the culture is literally owned by Hollywood, the Silicon Valley, Wall Street and Madison Avenue. This is the first time in their history, Boomershine notes, that churches have not appropriated the dominant communication system to serve people.

Boomershine defines our current electronic culture as the complex of cultural forces emerging in association with the development of electronic communication technologies. Like ‘oral culture’ and ‘literate culture’ these terms are shorthand for the cultural characteristics associated with the dominant and organizing system of communication in a culture. He notes that literate culture, where most churches still reside, is characterized by: hierarchical systems of social organization; abstract thought; books; the centrality of philosophy and empirical science; lectures; and reading and discussing Scriptures as a central religious practice.

Boomershine contrasts all this with electronic culture – today’s dominant global culture. This is characterized by: learning by participation and interactivity; the centrality of experience; high inter-ethnic interaction; multimedia; social networks; rapid technological change; transformation of the roles of women and, therefore, of men; and instant global communication. In a personal conversation with Boomershine about Communication Theology, he noted some profound concerns:

1. Theology, as a discipline, as a body of literature, is primarily a literate culture.
2. A fundamental issue for Communication Theology is: how do we interpret the Christian tradition in post-literate culture?
3. What are the basic orientations of thought/meaning in an electronic culture?
4. The bible needs to be re-conceived for an electronic culture.
5. The role of the theory of Christian communication in an electronic culture may need, at least in part, to be located outside of the academy, because it is wedded so completely to print culture.

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15 These concepts are used with Boomershine’s permission.
There are some legitimate concerns:

- Is the Communication Theology ‘movement’ mainly policy driven – primarily an attempt to influence church leadership?

- Is it inappropriate to parallel Communication Theology with liberation and feminist movements since they are prophetic voices on behalf of oppressed groups and Communication Theology is, instead, a different kind of hermeneutic?

- Should we simply let theologians continue to address communication and cultural concerns without trying to ‘systematize’ this? Are theologians capable of doing this systematic construction?

I am confident the above concerns can be addressed in a thoughtful and systematic way as this field of thought matures.

Faced with these challenges, let me introduce another map of the Communication Theology area. Daniel Felton speaks of an ‘unavoidable dialogue’ between theology and communication.¹⁶ Felton’s work specifies five such interfaces:

1. Theology and Communication – where theology borrows theories, methods, and models from communication studies to reflect upon religion

2. Systematic Theology of Communication – seeking to build a theoretical, theological study of communication within the sphere of systematic theology

3. Pastoral Theology of Communication – where one emphasizes practice in a theology that has appropriated communication theory and cultural studies

4. Christian Moral Vision of Communication – addressing moral dimensions of communication practice and policy making; and


As individual theologians reflect upon these varied types of interfaces, each might find one more amenable than others for their conceptualizing. My own personal preference is for a theological

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¹⁶ ‘The Unavoidable Dialogue: An Examination of Five Types of Relationships Between Theology and Communications,’ Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Theology, Gregorian University, Rome, April 1989. Felton summarized his content in *Media Development*, October 1989, pp 7-23.
framework that takes our global dialogic culture seriously. From this perspective theology is systematically informed by communication, both in its process and its content.

I believe Communication Theology will be systematically and self-consciously developed in the next decade or two. A body of Communication Theology literature is emerging. I have listed some helpful works at the end of this paper. One of the first was Paul Soukup’s fine review of the literature published in 1983. Soukup undertook a serious review of recent work in Communication and Theology, published in Cross Connections (2006) edited by Srampickal, Mazza and Baugh and cited in the bibliography below. Soukup reviews work within a number of categories: pastoral theology; applied theology; applying theological categories to communication; using communication tools to analyze religious texts; examining communication as a context for theology; using communication content (film, television, music) to prompt religious reflection; and using communication constructs to inform theological reflection.

One final on-the-ground example. The initiative entitled ‘Common Ground’ exemplifies communication dialogue. This was a process with significant implications for the U. S. Catholic Church and can be modeled globally. Begun under the leadership of the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, the Common Ground mission was to initiate many different projects, tasks, and communities of dialogue within the Catholic Church. It was not, itself, a project, with a specific task to be completed; it was, rather, a stimulus for many different discussion forums.

The statement inaugurating the initiative is entitled ‘Called to be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril’ and is reprinted in America magazine (August 31, 1996). There was a powerful response to this call for dialogue among Catholic Church members who are often polarized and divided. Within a few months there were almost four hundred thousand copies of the statement in print and it was featured widely in the media. In its early stages almost two thousand people downloaded the statement electronically. It has now been translated into many languages.

Some people are uneasy fostering discussion about the church’s authoritative teaching. Some felt this would resort to bitter debates rather than healthy respectful discussion. Cardinal Bernardin responded:

…the premise of our statement is that many serious disagreements that exist among Catholics do not necessarily involve dissent in the sense of a clear departure from authentic teaching. The statement recognizes the legitimacy, even the value, of disagreements when the discussion takes place within boundaries.17

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17 Catholic Common Ground Initiative: Foundational Documents, (N.Y. The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999). In the U.S. the Odyssey cable TV Channel broadcast twelve programs featuring Common Ground discussions. Seven videotapes – with discussion guides for local groups were available. The significance of communications interactivity is also acknowledged in the document Aetatis Novae issued by the Pontifical Council
Many national organizations and universities sponsored Common Ground events of their own. Such initiatives integrate theology and communication in a very practical and grassroots ways and they operate from a communication perspective that values interactivity.

**Some Strategies**

I believe *Communication Theology will emerge systematically and with strength when a number of foundational theology classics are written for the field (or produced in various artistic forms)* just as we saw this happen in liberation and feminist areas of theology. Many of these works will be authored by theologians familiar with cultural studies and communication specialties. The works of Joseph Palakeel in India (2003, 2007), and Brad Hinze in the United States (2006) are some examples. Some authors will be younger theologians – themselves comfortable products of a digital age – who can think outside of the conceptual ‘boxes’ of the past.

Financial support needs to be organized for such projects, to hold additional conferences, perhaps to initiate web activity, to plug into religious educators, seminary faculty and leadership conferences – to see if Communication Theology begins to solidify as its own conceptual field. A significant step is the decision to publish several collections of key Communication Theology writings for use in seminars and lay pastoral training programs. This will put significant Communication Theology writings at hand easily for theology-building and for pastoral practice. This commitment was made at a Communication Theology conference sponsored by the Gregorian University and held in Rome in September 2007.

It is probably healthy to have Communication Theology grow organically, project by project, book by book, image by image, event by event, rather than to be designed and coordinated structurally ‘from above.’ This would fit the look and the feel of a nonlinear digital age.

Many faith communities need to integrate these ‘signs of the times.’

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**Additional Readings**

III. Development of Communication Theology
Religion And Mediated Popular Culture: The Need For Dialogue

By Frances Forde Plude

[This text was published in Communicatio Socialis: Challenge of Theology and Ministry in the Church, Helmuth Rolfes and Angela Ann Zukowski, eds., Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2007.]

…it is finally only the human being who is capable of information and knowledge. This goes beyond the new technical means and stays as a quality of the human person. - Franz-Josef Eilers, Communicating in Community

I have been blessed with colleagues who respect cultural differences; and who listen. This has watered the roots of my own deep respect for dialogic communication and the empowerment supported by two-way communication. This paper reviews recent dialogic theory and develops a proposed ‘map’ of the practical terrain, reflecting upon how various communication technologies have produced a ‘talk-back’ culture. This culture has often been a challenge to the Catholic Church and her leadership.

The M.I.T. scholar Ithiel de Sola Pool is responsible for my ‘born-again’ passion for the interactive or dialogic dimension of communication. During my Harvard doctoral study, I had access to his classes at M.I.T. Pool also generously served as my dissertation advisor as I wrote on direct broadcast satellite policy development. In addition to my classes with Pool, two of his works were influential in my thinking. The first, The Social Uses of the Telephone (1977), studied basic concepts such as the telephone’s productive functions, the transparency of the tool when used, its importance for isolated individuals, the special role of women in its development, its function as the ‘heartbeat’ of large cities, and its life-saving role in telephone conversations and hotline groups.

Armed with these reflections I began to see dialogic communication as vital to a society in general, and to the Catholic Church specifically. I began to understand the importance of guaranteed and universal access to talk-back communication systems and tools. Early United States public policy reflected this access issue; the U.S. Congress required the telephone company monopoly to provide service for isolated rural communities along with its lucrative high-density urban phone development.

Pool’s later book, Technologies of Freedom, published in 1983 shortly before his death, helped me to understand the key role that emerging and converging new-technology interactive communication tools would play in encouraging freedom of expression and the processes of negotiation throughout the world. In this work Pool examined the significance of:
• unhindered speech
• limited resource availability
• computers as the printing presses of the future
• avoiding communication monopolies
• the marketplace of ideas
• the importance of a diversity of voices and tools
• the role of limited regulation

As Pool noted, *idea development and speech are not free if these communication forums are not open*. Today, sadly, even in some advanced societies and institutions (some would say even in the Roman Catholic Church), there are serious restrictions on two-way communication; many members – minority groups, laity and women – are not able to participate in representative numbers in policies and decision-making at upper levels of the church’s administrative structure.

**Analytical Framework**

Reflecting upon the relationships among communication studies, media, culture, and religion, and the challenge of supporting authentic integration of these sectors, several concepts emerge.

Foremost is the principle/process of *interactivity* and I examine that below. I begin by reflecting upon the development of interactive communication systems up through the late modern context, I have examined this evolution in the light of co-existing *cultural factors*, varied *media formats*, and *strands of social and religious thought*. Later in the paper I examine dialogue as theory and communicative action, including the concept of interactivity as *infrastructure* – the role of networks in contemporary communication systems.

Finally, I mention several practical applications of these interactive ideas. The first ‘case study’ is the *mediation* issue – the process of interactive meaning-making that occurs within individuals and social groups. The other practical arena is the field of *missiology* – the changing theology of how evangelizing should be done by religious groups around the world.

I believe faith communities must give as much attention to the culture of dialogue as to the culture of mass media (news, advertising, entertainment). I believe it was Mark Twain who commented that he did not understand what prose was until he realized he had been speaking it all his life! People are in an interactive mode all their lives! This reality must be acknowledged along with the impact of mass media in popular culture.

These thoughts came into focus in new ways when I was invited to join the International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture. This small think-tank allowed rich dialogue and direct experiences with varied cultures as we met for a week annually around the world – in
North America, Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe and in Eastern Europe. Especially helpful to me were the discussions where we stepped outside of Western cultural boxes.

Each member of the Commission continued their research and writing at their home base between our meetings, but then we were able to share these ideas when we met. For example, Stewart Hoover directed a project called “Symbolism, Meaning, and the Lifecourse,” in which more than 250 persons were interviewed regarding how various kinds of families approach the media in their homes. This research demonstrated clearly that audience reception data showed we underestimate the rich interactivity occurring between audience members and varied media and popular culture content and formats. Permeating, underlying, all mass and individual reception are the processes of interactivity. Individuals and cultures are constantly engaged in the interactive task. And in religious and academic settings, when we do not understand, or when we ignore, these interactions we overlook much of what constitutes communication.

As I noted above, my own deep respect for two-way communication was established over twenty years ago during my Harvard/M.I.T. studies. Since then I have left behind a paper trail of reflection on aspects of interactivity in communication studies.  

The Development of Interactive Communication Systems

Figures 1-4 in the Appendix represent my attempts to ‘map’ roughly some of the developments of interactive communication systems. I use the term systems because various categories of this framework represent systemic changes rather than separate events, technologies, or idea patterns.

On these ‘maps’ I have placed various components (cultural structures and structures of social/religious thought) in relationship to emerging media formats as I try to hint at the links between the three categories. In many cases there are causal connections. However, often events and changes (especially in cultural structures), simply occur together with the media formats and social/religious thought patterns; there are not always provable direct causes, but the categories are often inter-related. It is also difficult at times to sort out and match timelines exactly.

What the proposed links do show is that the increasing diversity of media channels – especially those media formats that allow ‘talk-back’ – seems to facilitate a number of things: decentralization; economic, political, and religious liberation; and the decline of hierarchical authority structures, for example.

Figure 1 begins with a unified medieval Christendom in a feudal culture. All this changes, however, with the introduction of the medium of printing. As books become a commodity we see the ability of individuals to interact with ideas and specific writers; various sectors of society gain their own voice.
As the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution sweep over Western civilization, centralized religious authority is further weakened and multiple distribution channels – including transportation links – facilitate interactivity. As technologies empower the systematic increase of bureaucratic structures, churches themselves become more bureaucratic and, under Pius IX an attempt is made (through the Syllabus of Errors) to control Catholic thought and refute modernist tendencies. There is increased centralization throughout power cultures – financial systems, colonial empires, and media empires (networks). Churches increasingly use newer communication tools to evangelize, as they had done in the past – first with an oral tradition, then with schools and monasteries, and later with the printed text.

As talk-back forums and technologies develop (Figure 2), it becomes more difficult to control the communication content of inter- and intra-group exchanges. Liberation movements emerge and become stronger, fueled by “people-on-the-streets” power – people who are connected instantly by faxes, Emails, chat rooms, and cell phones. The Second Vatican Council renews (and re-formulates) Catholic Church teaching and Council theology articulates concepts like collegiality and the unique importance of the local (national, regional) Church leadership and voices. Global collaboratives emerge, fueled again by technological links that facilitate two-way communication and financial transactions and trade. Later, Vatican II renewal impetus slows and churches in Northern hemispheres experience loss of personnel and membership while religious communities grow rapidly in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. People in the Northern countries (many liberal and secular) are, even today, completely unaware of the growth of Christianity in these areas.

And yet, facing the challenge of many voices, central authorities in the West, like the former Soviet Union and the centralized core of the Catholic Church, are under siege – by liberal/conservative religious thought, but also by national- and ethnic-loyalty voices that grow louder as they become more interconnected within regions and across boundaries, much of this fueled by technology links.

These dialogic developments, and accompanying tensions, grow (Figures 3-4) as various media converge – computers linking with communication networks, along with the interface of satellite and telephone distribution systems. Ownership of media companies becomes concentrated even as communication messages increase and diversify. Political states also both converge (the European Union, trade zones, etc.), and break up into ethnic enclaves, with many wars erupting. Churches try to encourage peace, but their voices are muted by the scandal of division and tension among the religious groups themselves.

Our current late modern scene contains growing numbers of immigrants and refugees, a worldwide AIDS epidemic, especially devastating on the African continent, increased use of U.S.
unilateral power in Iraq, and global church sex scandals. News media covering these events become increasingly interactive and argumentative. Internet use continues to grow, and mobile technology becomes widespread and smarter. Copyright issues focus on computerized video and audio distribution formats. The Al Jazeera news network, along with others, provides an interconnected focus for the Arab world. And, finally, blogs, My Space, and many similar sites, showcase millions of self-proclaimed producers of their own media.

Many religious groups reel under these cultural events, along with the challenge of the rapid spread of interactive communication technologies (a “digital culture”). Used to speaking authoritatively, they struggle to deal with a talk-back world.

**Dialogue as Theory and Communicative Action**

In a recent book, *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins noted “…we are currently living through one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide.” This transformation is occurring in the Southern hemisphere, far from the secularized, ‘liberated’ soil of the North (Europe, North America).

Jenkins warns that the presence of many fundamentalist “non-democratic states with theocratic pretensions” means that by the year 2050 almost 20 of the 25 largest nations will be predominately either Christian or Muslim and at least ten of these nations will be the scene of intense conflict. This could well be “a new age of Christian crusades and Muslim jihads.”

As I write, the world is experiencing more than 50 in-progress or recently concluded wars, many of them killing innocent civilians, engaging youth as combatants, and resulting in millions of refugees. Religious fervor fans many of these conflicts. These factors – and the hope that understanding dialogic processes can lead to communication, political, and religious breakthroughs – prompt me to continue the study of dialogic or two-way communication – both in theory and in practice.

A work that has been helpful to me is Dominic Emmanuel’s study *Challenges of Christian Communication and Broadcasting: Monologue or Dialogue?* (Macmillan, 1999). Emmanuel traces the development of dialogic theory from interesting sources: Martin Buber’s relational *I and Thou*; the mystic Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian of the Communist era; and the work of Brenda Dervin and her colleagues in seeking a conceptual space within which to posit the task of dialogue – which they call a theory of ‘in between’ (based somewhat on Buber’s *Between Man and Man*).

Dialogical theory has been enriched, of course, by the contributions of German intellectuals Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* and the two-volume work of Jürgen Habermas.
entitled *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Emmanuel notes that both “argue for a life of dialogue and explain why dialogue is important for human life in modern democratic societies.” Key among Gadamer’s thoughts are concepts such as: the nature of interpretation; the phenomenon of understanding beyond exclusively scientific investigation; the need for receptivity or openness to the other’s tradition as a genuine partner in communication; the theme of the ‘fusion of horizons’ (of the other, of the past), opening up new horizons, like the ‘in-between’ of Buber and Dervin. Habermas, seeking the sources of reliable human knowledge, interacted with the work of Gadamer. Emmanuel notes “Habermas’s main work is an attempt to prove that ordinary use of language by competent speakers embodies within it a dialogical principle…”

The theory of communicative action of Habermas is intrinsically dialogical. Emmanuel explains that the theory of Habermas “makes a significant contribution to the understanding of dialogue, in that it proposes that one does not need to look for arbiters to conduct conversation or dialogue among individuals or communities, but that the language uttered for fundamental communication in everyday social transactions, embodies in itself the very principle of dialogue.”

In his chapter, “The Reception of Doctrine: New Perspectives” the theologian Richard Gaillardetz proposes a new dialogical model of doctrinal teaching and the reception of this teaching. (I have often thought that the reception of church doctrine, like reception of media program material, often yields surprises for the producers of the doctrine). Gaillardetz notes: “Habermas came to see the emancipatory power of human communication. It is only through authentic communication that we can overcome the alienation which is endemic to our modern world.” Gaillardetz concludes: “… the acid test for any community is not harmony but how differences of opinion and even division are handled within the community.”

**The Infrastructure of Dialogue: Networks**

While the theory of dialogue is enriched by Buber, Dervin, Gadamer, Habermas and others, dialogic infrastructures are growing everywhere like a variety of flowers in a well-tended garden. I like to think of these as ‘webs of significance’ or ‘webs of inclusion’, as the business consultant Sally Helgesen refers to them. If we ‘think link’, all varieties of networks come to mind:

- computer *internets* and *intranets*
- mass media networks that are satellite- and telephone-linked
- prolific chat forums, blogs, MySpace-type arenas, podcasts
- talking back to TV/radio/film through call-ins, blogs, and Email reactions
- market-transaction networks from large corporate transactions to E-bay sales
- 24/7 stock market transactions
- military defense and surveillance systems
• data base links that contain our credit card transactions or medical records
• increasing mobile network links
• ubiquitous cell phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs)

Networking, under different names, has been occurring for many centuries. The Roman and British Empires were certainly networks. Various faith communities are networks. What has changed, of course, is the facilitation of networking through recent interactive communication technologies like those mentioned above. We are beginning to see thoughtful evaluations of the impact of widespread dialogical networks as they permeate and alter our cultural habits.

Jon Alterman has written *New Media, New Politics: From Satellite Technology to the Internet in the Arab World*, a publication of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He notes that even mid-level communication technologies have internationalized local politics. The role of audio cassettes from Paris in fomenting the Iranian Revolution is quite well known.

Now, however, the fact that news emerges easily from global sources like on-the-spots blogs means one can ‘work' politics (and, I might add, religious and cultural messages) from anywhere in the world. This can build loyalties that go way beyond national borders – for example for Iranians, Jews, Asian, Hispanic, or Ukrainian diaspora groups dispersed around the world. With increased public discussion and Internet sites, everyone competes for idea-coverage and some bad ideas surface. In conflict, peoples’ appetite for information increases. This may seem to go ‘downhill' as entertainment intervenes, but the widespread dispersion of entertainment formats also changes cultural content and boundaries.

The concept of being ‘boundaryless’ is addressed by Stanford Law professor Lawrence Friedman in his work *The Horizontal Society* (Yale University Press, 1999). He states:

> In modern society, identity (and authority) is much more horizontal… modern men and women are much freer to form relationships that are on a plane of equality (real or apparent) – relationships with peers, with like-minded people… We are becoming ‘fluid and many-sided,’ evolving a ‘sense of self appropriate to the restlessness and flux of ‘our times’ – a sense of self that Robert Jay Lifton has called ‘protean.’

Friedman notes that “(a) horizontal group becomes a kind of nation when it generates a strong sense of belonging and demands a high level of commitment”, like ‘The Nation of Islam.’ The Internet, of course, makes linking among horizontal groups easy and instantaneous.
This clearly has religious implications:

The horizontal society has weakened two pillars of religious identity: first, that religion is truly a heritage, something given as a birthright and not to be abandoned casually … and second, that one’s religion is the One True Faith. The latter is still official dogma in some religions, but it is not what many people really believe. The chief dogma of the horizontal society is individual choice.\textsuperscript{13}

As one seeks both unity and diversity, the concept of ‘plural equality’ emerges and Friedman asks: Can this work? He notes that many rainbow coalitions are nothing but talk; plural equality at the level of culture and ideology is more difficult. He cites as successes, Singapore, and the federal republic of Switzerland. He guesses that “each country has its own chemical reaction to plural equality… there must be, perhaps, some kind of minimal, but binding, identity.”

Freidman points to the consequences of the horizontal society:

- it has been created by mass media, transport, and modernity
- authority tends to merge with celebrity status
- this affects, at the deepest level, a person’s sense of self
- this society is a society on the move since messages get to remote areas
- the society is divided into identity groups

**Practical Considerations**

I have selected two arenas where practical applications exist as we look at interactivity ‘on the ground.’ Both represent large ideas that perhaps many have not considered thoughtfully enough.

The first is the theory (and reality) of mediation, as proposed by Jesús Martin-Barbero.\textsuperscript{14} Martin-Barbero’s challenging work notes that audiences interact – to some extent even control or mediate – mass media content and impact. He notes: “Now the masses, with the help of technology, feel nearer to even the most remote and sacred things. Their perception carries a demand for equality that is the basic energy of the masses.”\textsuperscript{15}

One example of the power of interactivity is cited by Martin-Barbero. In a poor slum of Lima, a group of women attempted to organize the marketplace better. “…they found a tape recorder and some loudspeakers… the women began to use the tape recorder to interview people of the neighborhood as to what they thought about the market and to provide music and celebrations… they were criticized by a person of higher status, a nun, who ridiculed the way they talked… some of the women went to the communication center to announce dejectedly, ‘We discovered that the nun was right… But we also have understood that with the help of this little machine we
can learn how to speak.’ And from that day the women of the market decided to tell stories about their own lives. They no longer used the recorder just to listen to others but they began to use it to learn how to speak. This incident reminds me of the revolutionary work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire.

The second grassroots application of interactivity or dialogue that interests me needs a lot more reflection than I can give it here. When you read more about respecting local cultures and local theologies and the staggering growth of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, one becomes aware of the need for re-thinking the evangelization procedures of religious groups. One work has been very helpful: *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Orbis, 1988) by Louis J. Luzbetak.

Missiology is a form of applied anthropology, and the Church is clearly an agent of cultural change. When Christianity interacts with local cultures there is a missiological dilemma. Often this results in dual religious systems operating alongside each other. (One hot-button area today is work being done by theologians attempting to write about Christ and other religions/cultures). Luzbetak provides a helpful summary of missiological applications when conditions do favor change.

**Conclusions**

An underlying issue of the current U.S. Catholic Church crisis (in addition to sexual abuse victim pain), is the predominately one-way communication culture of the church’s organizational leadership. As the church renews itself, lay people will insist on being heard; leadership will be pressured to listen, especially by digital and dialogic media oversight. My reflections here have pointed to the need to recognize the interactive fabric of media, religion, and culture. We have reviewed the historical development of communication/media interactivity, along with accompanying cultural structures and structures of social/religious thought. We have considered how dialogue theory has been enriched by the work of individuals like Buber, Bakhtin, Gadamer, Habermas, and Brenda Dervin and her research team. We have also looked at emerging analysis of horizontal networks on political activity, personal sense of self and the result of bonded (sometimes exclusive) identity groups. Two specific examples include the importance of mediation in audience reception and the different approaches to evangelization (missiology) in the light of newer respect for grassroots cultures and feedback.

All this needs to be studied in the context of global religion, especially the growing numbers and the strong force of religious identity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. At its foundation, much of this is a power/dominance issue. There is a need for the growth process around the world to be socially informed, rather than demand based. Everett Rogers and Lawrence Kincaid put it
another way: “… the capacity to develop and manage communication networks is an important prerequisite for self-sustaining socio-economic development over time.”

Endnotes

1 This is just one of several helpful Eilers volumes.

2 Pool had, himself, done some writing on DBS issues, but the theoretical questions were transformed in the late 1970s when the Communication Satellite Corporation (Comsat) announced its intention to develop DBS. I was pleased that Pool wanted to reconsider his own satellite ideas through my dissertation research.

3 See the References list for some of my writings on the issue of dialogue in communication.

4 Jenkins notes that as we assembled retrospective lists approaching the twenty-first century “the attitude seemed to be, what religious change in recent years could possibly compete in importance with the major secular trends, movements like fascism or communism, feminism or environmentalism? To the contrary, I suggest that it is precisely religious changes that are the most significant, and even the most revolutionary, in the contemporary world. Before too long, the turn-of-the-millennium neglect of religious factors may be economically myopic, on a par with the review of the eighteenth century that managed to miss the French Revolution.” Of course, for Americans, the impact of the religious right in politics, and the 9/11 attack, brought religion to everyone’s attention.

5 Jenkins argues: “Over the past century … the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. … If we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian favela. … (By the year 2025) there (will) be around 2.6 billion Christians, of whom 633 million would live in Africa, 640 million in Latin America, and 460 million in Asia. Europe, with 555 million would have slipped to third place” p 2.


9 The Gaillardetz chapter is in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, edited by Bernard Hoose, Ashgate, 2002, pp 95-117.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 *The Horizontal Society*, p 5.

13 Ibid., p 228.

14 These ideas are discussed extensively in *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*, Sage, 1993, translated by Elizabeth Fox and Robert A. White.

15 Ibid., p 48.

16 Ibid, p 186.

17 See pp 351-359.

18 *Communication Networks: Toward a New Paradigm for Research*, Everett M. Rogers and D. Lawrence Kincaid.

**References**


Appendix

4 GRIDS Showing Development of Interactive Communication Systems

Figure 1

**CENTRALIZED PERIODS**
Constructed by Frances Forde Plude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feudal society</td>
<td>oral traditions</td>
<td>Catholic Church’s association with medieval culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monarchy</td>
<td>art in culture</td>
<td>monasticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crusades</td>
<td>monastery scriptoria</td>
<td>cathedrals dominate village squares</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| feudal society      | oral traditions | Catholic Church’s association with medieval culture |
| monarchy            | art in culture  | monasticism                            |
| Crusades            | monastery scriptoria | cathedrals dominate village squares |
| reformation         | printing        | Catholic Church’s unified/central authority threatened |
| rise of Middle Class| books become a commodity | other sectors experience their voice |
| enlightenment       | letters of correspondence | a secular society, philosophy and science assault religious authority |
| revolutions (France, U.S.) | posters  | | |
| schools emerge      | telegraph and telephone | Catholic Church social theory supports workers after many years of labor strife |
| Industrial Revolution| penny press emerges | | |
| steam engines encourage travel | rails link geographic areas | | |
| bureaucracies increase | elevators, skyscrapers, telephones encourage organizational structures | churches increase their own bureaucratic structures |
| much centralized economic and political power | mass media grow/concentrate | churches see media as a way of evangelizing mass audiences (spreading the word) |
| o banks/financial systems | newspapers | church publishing grows |
| o colonial empires | magazines for large audiences | TV and radio ministries |
| o nation-states clash in two global wars | radio | centralized unified voice |
| o mass media grow/concentrate | large television networks | large audiences stressed |
| o cinema | | |
**Figure 2: Development of Interactive Communication Systems**

**DECENTRALIZED PHASES (1960s TO DATE)**

*Construct* by Frances Forde Plude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • liberation movements  
  o social structures under siege  
  o feminism  
  o civil rights  
  o gay rights  
  o sexual revolution  
  o ecology/green revolution  
  o growth of choice/options | • group media  
  o structures for group support  
  ▪ base communities  
  ▪ telephone support groups (A.A., bereavement support, women’s groups) | • Vatican II  
  • “people of God” view emerges  
  • emphasis on local church/vernacular  
  o development of national bishop conferences  
  o increasing laity roles defined but not implemented |
| • cybernetics/systems theory  
  o new social management tools  
  o new decision-making styles  
  • pyramid management structures/hierarchies are under pressure in social institutions | • mass media threatened by cable/VCRs/individual satellite feeds  
  • national newspapers and magazines cut back; specialized journals and local press expand  
  • newsletters multiply with electronic publishing and email | • large numbers of clergy, religious leave vowed congregations and dioceses  
  • co-responsibility concept develops with parish/diocesan councils  
  • theologians argue against excessive central control by Rome  
  • central authority of Roman Catholic church feels under siege again (like at the Reformation) and gets defensive |
| • political/social organizations threatened, somewhat paralyzed, by “tyranny of many small minorities”  
  • corporations decentralize  
  • Soviet Union begins to break apart | • computers merge with communication  
  o people interconnected horizontally (like telephones earlier)  
  • media/information overload assaults individual and institutional effectiveness | • liberation theology  
  • charismatic movements  
  • polarization within churches  
  • Vatican II impetus slows  
  • few people enter religious orders  
  • laity frustrated by limited voice  
  • celibacy for priests is questioned  
  • women’s ordination movement  
  • growing number of Christians in Asia, Africa, Latin America |

49
Figure 3: Development of Interactive Communication Systems

**GROWTH OF DIALOGIC THEORY AND STRUCTURES**
Construct by Frances Forde Plude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• increasing numbers of global mechanisms / cooperation / treaties to solve global</td>
<td>• increasing use of intra-group media/messaging</td>
<td>• increasing strength of local and ethnic theologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>issues (ecology, famine, fishing, trade tariffs)</td>
<td>○ answering machines</td>
<td>○ national bishop conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• European Union and other regional consortia formed</td>
<td>○ computers</td>
<td>○ priest-personnel senates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• collaborative legal structures struggle to get born (space law, international</td>
<td>○ fax</td>
<td>○ women asserting themselves; vowed religious congregations restructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical standardization)</td>
<td>○ email</td>
<td>○ language pressured to move beyond gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• glasnost/end of Cold War</td>
<td>○ mobile radio/phones</td>
<td>○ liturgical varieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Eastern European democracies struggle politically/economically</td>
<td>○ paging systems</td>
<td>• growing awareness that prayer (contemplative, charismatic) is widely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• increasing use of U.N</td>
<td>○ teleconferencing</td>
<td>practiced among laity, not just professed religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• emergence of term “World Order”</td>
<td>• need to coordinate media due to overload of information sources and content</td>
<td>• collectives of theologians organize joint statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Berlin wall falls and unites Germany</td>
<td>• convergence of media</td>
<td>• growing attention to global poverty and justice issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• concentration/cross-ownership of media companies</td>
<td>• voice of the churches somewhat muted due to their own strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• digital technology begins to replace analog modes</td>
<td>• churches called upon to move beyond internal divisions to offer the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• increasing strength of local and ethnic theologies</td>
<td>world a moral, spiritual collaborative vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• wars emerge from lack of negotiation and unified world order mechanisms</td>
<td>• global attempts to establish communication links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a struggle to be truly collaborative among nations</td>
<td>○ domain addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• strong nation-state presence (U.S./U.K./Europe, etc.) remains</td>
<td>○ encourage internet use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• UN role shows need for more formal, institutionalized collaborative mechanisms</td>
<td>○ copyright protection of intellectual property becomes a concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• global attempts to establish communication links</td>
<td>○ privacy issues emerge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• growing attention to global poverty and justice issues</td>
<td>• voice of the churches somewhat muted due to their own strife</td>
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<td>• churches called upon to move beyond internal divisions to offer the</td>
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<td>• strong nation-state presence (U.S./U.K./Europe, etc.) remains</td>
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### Figure 4: Development of Interactive Communication Systems

**A POSTMODERN VIEW**  
*Constructed by Frances Forde Plude*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
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| • increasing globalization  
• increasing ethnic clashes with national boundaries and nearby states  
• growing numbers of immigrants and refugees flowing over borders  
• sociologists identify the reality of ‘the project of the self’: autonomous and reflexive | • continuing breakdown of large network audiences within U.S. and other countries  
  o cable diversification  
  o global satellite broadcasts  
  o VCR transmission systems  
• news broadcasts become more interactive and argumentative  
• increasing popularity of talk-back  
• cell phone used for audio/video  
• computer miniaturization/growth  
• blogs, websites like MySpace project self-narratives | • established religious groups struggle to adapt to rapid technology change, growing liberation movements and a culture of talking back  
• media-literacy movement (in schools and churches) contributes to media awareness and some media-bashing  
• global attention to sex- and cover-up scandals within Catholic Church; leadership crisis emerges  
• gradual awareness of ‘a generation of seekers’ (after spirituality) |
| • world-wide AIDS epidemic  
• negotiation theorists and practitioners attempt to resolve difficulties  
• growing use of peacekeeping forces  
• increasing global terrorism and attack on U.S. World Trade Center  
• growing use of U.S. unilateral power (Iraq, etc.)  
• Middle East war erupts with increased use of suicide bombers  
• increased outsourcing of labor  
• climate change awareness | • WWW and internet use developed cyberspace network world with increased use of motion video  
• changes occur in personal communication habits  
• system-wide communication in corporations and politics changes  
• wireless technology allows on-the-spot dialogic networks  
• music videos and video disks make entertainment product more mobile  
• CDs, DVDs and iPods permit video and audio downloading and piracy  
• Al Jazeera news network gives a systematic voice to the Arab world | • churches and media researchers become aware that audience reception is key; it is individualized and sometimes rebellious  
• pluralism and ambiguity  
• hermeneutics voices issue of cultural interpretation  
• communication is re-defined by some as cultural mediation  
• growing visibility of fundamentalist movements  
• tensions rise as growth of Christianity and Islam explodes in Africa, Asia, Latin America |
Interactive Communication In The Catholic Church

By Frances Forde Plude

[This text is a chapter in the book The Church and Communication, edited by Patrick Granfield, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994.]

On a foggy morning in Berlin a taxi dropped me at the Brandenburg Gate. Tears came to my eyes as I felt communion with people who had struggled to participate, to unite. I had been part of it through the mass media. For many, the fall of the Berlin Wall remains a symbol of hope and enormous challenge. If this happened so quickly and dramatically – in Berlin and, later, in Moscow and the Middle East – then barriers can be minimized between local, regional, national, and global communities.

Unity in diversity is a challenge for churches and society in a postmodern world.

In Lumen gentium, the Second Vatican Council referred to a multiplicity of "the abilities, the resources, and customs of peoples", saying "each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church." At the historical moment of the Council, we were called to communion and community. The ideas that follow are an attempt to reflect on aspects of communication and the theology of communio. Specific questions guide our study:

1. What forms of participatory communications are emerging in churches? What is the role of authority in such forums?
2. How do we encourage collaboration, called animating forms of cooperation by the theologian Hermann Pottmeyer?
3. Must participatory freedom lead to polarization and, in reaction, central control?
4. Can new communication and collaborative theories help churches become vital communities, to reanimate an apparent diminution of faith in some modern societies?

**Conceptual Framework**

It is helpful to make some comments about the analytical perspective employed here. This is clearly an interdisciplinary investigation. Theology, specifically ecclesiology, and communication studies are involved in this inquiry, and the communication ideas will involve both theoretical reflections and practical guidelines. Applicable too are insights from social theory and from the field of organizational communication since it is a challenge to coordinate dialogical responses within Church structures. Much study is required concerning the process and interrelatedness of those communicating.
Two theologians have noted that Vatican II should be considered transitional – a work in progress. Pottmeyer called the Council "an act of setting out... not as a single, once-and-for-all step, but as an example of a passage to be made over and over again, in every moment, the signs of which must be read in the light of the Gospel." In a similar vein, Walter Kasper noted that "today there is not yet any way which leads fundamentally beyond the Council.... It is not only that we do not have the presuppositions and the preliminary work. We have not, as of yet, nearly exhausted the potentialities of the last Council."

I will draw substantially here from my own research on collaborative systems theory – reflections on cooperative strategies in a media/information world. These ideas supply a framework for analysis that can aid us in our understanding of emerging realities of communication and Church. Hopefully, such a framework will enable others to offer additional organizing principles, thus encouraging both unity and diversity.

We need to explore specific topics:

- participatory components of communio ecclesiology
- emerging communication theories of discourse
- how these two areas converge and interact in participatory communications
- applications and case study examples: collaborative communications; the implications of freedom and autonomy; new roles for laity
- specific suggestions and goals for the future

Lonergan reminds us in Method in Theology that "A community... is an achievement of common meaning." And we must recall the practical advice of Dulles, in 1971, in a prophetic document: "The Church cannot wall itself up in a cultural ghetto at a time when humanity as a whole is passing into the electronic age."

**Participatory Components of Communio Ecclesiology**

There is a distinction, of course, between ecclesiology – the aspect of theology that examines the nature and mission of the Church – and what the Church is, in practice. Historical diversity and the development of ecclesiology permit a richness in the Church’s own self-understanding. In the last century, the Church was presented as a full and perfect society, on the same level as the state; at the same time, emphasis was placed on the hierarchical and juridical aspects of the Church as institution. Later the theme of the Mystical Body was stressed, integrating previous concepts of Church.

Various aspects of the Church’s nature and mission have been made more understandable by the models of Church proposed by Avery Dulles. The first model mentioned, the Church as
institution, places exclusive emphasis on the hierarchical structure. This model notes that the Church descends from God through its hierarchy to others. The faithful are asked to assent to this and subordinate themselves. The hierarchy represent authoritative teachers (ecclesia docens), and the people are learners (ecclesia discens). This was the view of Church emphasized when the Second Vatican Council began.

Dulles identifies and explores other images of Church, including the Church as Herald (to proclaim its message), as Sacrament (Church as sign, personal witness) and the secular-dialogic metaphor. In another work Dulles speaks of Discipleship as an appropriate image of Church.

A clearly distinct model is the Church as communio – a fellowship animated by the Spirit. No one metaphor contains the totality of the Church’s nature and each contributes to our understanding. Different individuals will tend toward various aspects of Church. We should note that each model of Church has a different image and seems to have its own style of communication appropriate to it.

In the document Lumen gentium the Council sets forth the Church’s revised understanding of her own nature. Dulles notes that Lumen gentium, ”because of its central importance and its wealth of doctrine, probably deserves to be called the most imposing achievement of Vatican II.” Indeed, the very process of developing Lumen gentium is an example of a participatory forum. As Dulles notes: ”The successive drafts of the Constitution, compared with one another, strikingly reveal the tremendous development in self-understanding of the Church which resulted from the dialogue within the Council.” (Emphasis added) The institutional and communio models of Church had supporters within the Council. Some tension between these diverse ecclesiologies continues after the Council efforts to express the nature of church. The Church, organic and graced, is – in the last analysis – a mystery because it is an embodiment of the essential mystery of God Incarnate.

Several participatory concepts do emerge in Lumen gentium, including a creative view of laity roles and the principle of bishops’ collegiality. Both provide a balance to the earlier heavy emphasis on papal power and authority. The new self-understanding was based upon biblical scholarship and a reconnection with early Church history and practice. Most consider graced this bold new direction in the Church’s self-understanding and participatory vision. On the practical level, however, it did require compromise as the dialogue at the Council proceeded. As a result, several ecclesiologies exist side by side in Council documents; this has made subsequent application of Council teaching somewhat complicated and even contentious.

Pottmeyer writes ”The active reception of the Council’s first steps toward a new ecclesial self-understanding is... a task that will take decades.... Would it not have been inherently contradictory to give a fixed legal formulation to what was in fact the expression of a desire for
transition and mobility?” Much participatory development has occurred since the Council; understandably, it has not been easy.

**Shared Responsibility**

The Council challenged *all* Church members to accept responsibility as a community specifically called – participating actively in the Church’s life and mission by virtue of their sacramental entrance into the community. Kasper notes that this marked the end of a pattern of a welfare Church.

In hardly any sector since the Council have things moved so much as here.... Stimulated by the Council, bodies of common responsibility have come into being on all levels of the church’s life: parish councils, diocesan councils, diocesan synods, episcopal synods. Lay interest, and the preparedness of lay people to take a share of responsibility, is perhaps the most valuable and most important contribution of the post-conciliar period.

It is helpful to look briefly at the issue of democracy in the Church. Rahner notes:

... many structures and institutions may be built into the Church which give the people of the Church a more active role than that which they have previously had in the life of the Church itself. In other words... these new structures and institutions may signify ‘democratic’ rights within the Church. In fact, many changes in this direction have in practice already been achieved within the Church, even though we may hold the opinion that still more changes of the same kind will have to take place in the future.

Schillebeeckx gives extensive treatment to this issue in a chapter entitled "Towards Democratic Rule of the Church as a Community of God.” This work explores the impact of various historical developments: bishops as feudal princes; the Enlightenment; the French Revolution; bourgeois religion; and the Council’s final "break with its feudal past.”

The co-responsibility of all believers for the church... essentially includes the participation of all believers in decisions relating to church government (however this may be organized in practice). Vatican II also gave at least some institutional encouragement towards making this universal participation possible: the Roman synods, the national councils, the episcopal conferences, the councils of priests, the diocesan and parish councils of lay believers and the frameworks of many organizations.
Schillebeeckx notes the danger of emphasizing” our one-sidedly technological consumer society” and urges the interplay of official teaching authority and the teaching authority of believers and their theologians (always in some tension.\textsuperscript{18}

Obviously, the Church is not free to disregard Scripture and tradition; and it retains divine guidance. Kasper also notes that the term people of God does not mean a political association of people or ’ordinary, simple people,’ as distinct from the establishment.... It means the organic and structured whole of the church, the people gathered round their bishop, and attached to their shepherd, as Cyprian put it.”\textsuperscript{19}

**An Open Systems View of Church**

Many would agree on the concept of shared responsibility in the Church. The tensions arise when it is worked out in practice. Much of the difficulty relates to communication patterns and practices. Another issue is the need to develop and build a theory of subsidiarity; it is not just a question of Rome implementing it. What is required is the *institutionalization* of subsidiarity. This needs to be developed organically, not simply from the top down, or one contradicts the principle of subsidiarity. These are some of the specific tasks when integrating practical applications of authority and co-responsibility in churches today.

Many of these issues are worked out at the local level. Thus, the Church at the parish and diocesan level is the focus of much current ecclesial inquiry and theological reflection. Joseph Komonchak notes reasons for the shift to the local Church. These include “...the revaluation of the bishop’s role; the importance of regional episcopal collegiality; ecumenical reflection on the differences compatible with unity; challenges of inculturation;... (the need for) genuine community in a world of increased anonymity and bureaucracy...”\textsuperscript{20}

The Church also exists in a society of advancing scientific inquiry. From an organizational or institutional viewpoint, it is helpful to examine the impact of one scientific perspective – systems theory.

Everett and Rekha Rogers have analyzed organizational communication. One can trace the history of organizational behavior studies from early scientific management days through the discovery of human relations. Rogers notes the emergence of ”a more eclectic and encompassing viewpoint” in the 1960s and 1970s – ”the systems school.”\textsuperscript{21} Based on general systems theory, this viewpoint ”conceptualizes an organization as a system of interrelated components, and stresses the orchestration of these parts as the key to maximizing performance.... This intellectual viewpoint has been the single most influential theory in contemporary scientific thought, especially in the social sciences.”\textsuperscript{22}
These theorists conceive of a system as a set of *interdependent* parts. Communication is one essential element of any system – linking the parts (subsystems) and facilitating their interdependence. The focus on *interaction* is significant; the increasing interactivity of communication technologies, discussed below, parallels the emphasis on interactivity in systems theory. This theme of interdependence is reflected also, of course, in the ecclesiology of *communio*.

In describing an open system approach Rogers explains:

> A system is a set of units that has some degree of structure, and that is differentiated from the environment by a boundary. The system’s boundary is defined by communication flows... any system that does not input matter, energy, and information from its environment will soon run down and eventually cease to exist... an open system continuously exchanges information with its environment.\(^{23}\)

Research within organizations indicates, “the more turbulent environments require a more differentiated and decentralized organizational structure.”\(^{24}\) This may have interesting ramifications for churches today.

I have seen two interesting applications of systems concepts to ecclesiology and church governance. The first is a study of ecclesial cybernetics by Patrick Granfield.\(^{25}\) This author uses case study analysis (of slavery, birth control, ecumenism, and celibacy) to examine concepts of democratic (interactive) communication, noting implications for ecclesiology. In citing institutional conditions for improved church communication and responsive decision-making, Granfield lists:

- small communities fostering religious commitment
- the principle of pluralism
- greater local autonomy and flexibility
- credible study commissions; and
- broad participation in the selection of leadership

Another study uses a systems approach to analyze shared responsibility in the educational system of the Church.\(^{26}\) Olin J. Murdick designed a systems approach reality grid. In the Murdick model, specific operational components – such as goals, policies, programs, and governance – move through systematic stages. This significant study provided much of the theoretical foundation for the development of participatory school boards for Catholic schools in the United States. Murdick’s concept of the School Board as the voice of the community is almost a metaphor for other participatory forums within the Church.
The challenge is to respect the role of authority while facilitating dialogue. The sensitive leader knows participation permits both information-sharing and human affirmation. We have reviewed the ecclesiology of communio and the significance of systems theory in the institutional Church. It is important to understand that, in parallel with these, dynamic developments have occurred in the field of communication.

**The Role of the Message and Stories in Our Lives**

When we review human history and communication roles within it, we move back before the time of complex structures when oral cultures were smaller and communal. Linking these groups required communication channels, both oral and written. These patterns were present in both Judaic and early Christian communities or churches. Leaders emerged; however, much interaction occurred among local people because there were not complex infrastructures above them or easy access to other groups. The storyteller represented data storage – like computer memory of today.

When the technology of print emerged in medieval Europe an upheaval occurred that eventually fractured the local and regional loyalties of feudal society. Other factors include the Reformation, the ascendancy of the arts, the Enlightenment, and the concept of absolutism – the idea that power could be centralized in a king or a state. Meanwhile, trade routes provided financial and communications infrastructures; later the Industrial Revolution and nation-state concept added complexities making communication channels more difficult to analyze. This brings us quickly up to modern history, but it is here that we must function. And it is in this context that the Church must discern how communication theory and tools can infuse its unique mission and service to others.

Complicating and enriching this modern context is the growth of natural sciences and social sciences. Included are varied specifics such as: economic theory; psychiatry; systems analysis; the growth of bureaucracies; the science of management; the development of the democratic ideal; striving for universal education; personalism (fulfilling the earlier promise of the Enlightenment); the rise and fall of colonialism; and modern liberation movements. It is no wonder all this seems impossible to control or understand! The fact is control – at least centralized control – is much more difficult, if not completely impossible, in the light of the above developments and the advances of mass communication systems.

Two additional factors should be mentioned. At least in the United States, pressure groups have focused enormous energies, funds, and communication manipulation into special-interest arenas, causing the noted consultant Peter Drucker and others to speak of gridlock when describing it. In addition, communication/information overload is tending to induce fear and anxiety, breeding
conflict. Where does hope reside? Why should one trust in animating forms of cooperation, as Pottmeyer uses the term above? Advances in communication theories help somewhat. Specialists in communication are more sophisticated in tracking information flows between individuals, among groups, and within organizations and societal structures. New communication theories arise, like the public sphere model discussed below. And information *technologies* can provide enabling infrastructures – electronic highways which parallel the trade routes, railroads, and canals of previous ages.

In a 1989 conference of theologians and communication scholars held in Rome, some efforts were made to link the ecclesial concept of *communio* with communication sciences. One participant, Ricardo Antoncich, noted that theology (as reflection about the faith of the Church), should dialogue with other forms of thought that rationally explain the life of the human being in the world. He noted: ”Methodologically, the contribution of communication to ecclesiology does not refer exclusively to the analysis of how the Church lives its internal or external communication; rather it refers to the total contribution that communication sciences offer to the understanding of the human person, the world, and history.”

Hermann Pottmeyer, another participant, offered a corresponding model of communication/communio. He spoke of *communio* as a leitmotif – a norm or criterion – for the Church, her structure and relations. Rather than a concrete single concept, it has a theological and anthropological meaning. Pottmeyer noted *communio* has three corresponding communications dimensions:

1. communication within the church (communio fidelium, communio ecclesiarum);
2. extra-ecclesial communication (Church as sacrament of the Kingdom within the unity of mankind);
3. and the self-communication of God (history of salvation).

All Church communication converges within the framework of divine self-communication, thus the Church’s role as sign or witness.

**Communication Forums**

In speaking of the emerging models of communication we need to move toward the concept of *participative communication forums*. Our first guide toward this path is Bernard Häring’s thoughtful essay, “Ethics of Communication”, in his volume on moral theology for priests and laity. Häring speaks in this work about mass media (TV, films, advertising), but we also see here the early traces of a sensitive awareness of communication as *interactive* and *dialogic*. He speaks of The Word as listener; he says the ”Spirit *is* sharing,” (his emphasis). He writes: “A teaching
Church that is not, above all, a learning, listening Church, is not on the wavelength of divine communication.”

In this work, written decades ago, Häring says that a new dimension of today’s communication is its “public forum” role. “The public forum in which information and opinions are exchanged is not something static... it is the sum of various 'worlds’” and he reminds us: "Vatican II considers the awareness of this changing world as fundamental for understanding our task.” Häring moves then to a rich appreciation of pluralism.

Pluralism is not at all anarchy of ideas and a structureless society. Democracy needs mutual respect and agreement on basic values. But tolerance does not imply neutrality of thought... a legitimate pluralism is never a threat but rather an indispensable condition for catholicity in truth and truth in catholicity....

As one of the outstanding signs of the times, pluralism invites a courageous and generous ecumenical spirit and action. He concludes:

... the full recognition of pluralism and methods of dialogue, the common search for truth, and reciprocal communication not only do not threaten the consistency and unity of a united Christianity but can greatly help to strengthen and deepen them.

Häring confronts the pathologies of modern communication, the dark side. He bemoans technology-for-its-own-sake, the lack of access, the manipulation.

One of the most serious threats to human integrity is the constant exposure to scenes of excessive cruelty. This abuse of mass media, which suggests that the normal solution of human conflict is violence and even cruelty, is called by Haseldon “the most monstrous obscenity of our time.” Particularly dangerous to humankind is the glorification of war and “the glamorizing of the military tradition.”

In an overview of Church documents on media, Häring concludes that evangelization through mass media should involve a prudent limitation of any media that make dialogue difficult. “Churches have to develop a dialogical style that invites everyone to participate trustfully.”

**Culture and the Public Sphere**

The concept of communication as *forum* (thereby dialogical) is a bold move in a field that has tended to focus on the model of a message moving from a source to a receiver (with much
passivity). Under the influence of studies in cultural anthropology and linguistics, scholars now realize the significant interaction between communication and popular culture. We know that the common currency of any culture is deeply integrated into the communication channels existing within that culture. Robert White S.J. formerly at the Gregorian University, has done a significant analysis of this, applied to developing nations. White uses a concept stressed by other scholars, the public sphere.

Descriptively, the public sphere refers to that aspect of social action, cultural institutions, and collective decision-making that affects all people in the society and engages the interests of all people in the national body.... a nation may be said to exist insofar as it has a core of social interaction that is truly common and public.\(^{35}\)

**Interactivity: An Epistemological Turning Point**

Driving an epistemological revolution is the interactivity of new communication technologies. To date much social science research in communication has focused on either the message *content* or media *effects* – linear models. We are now facing a totally new direction in our analytical focus, moving to communication-as-exchange, to the *process* of interaction.

Everett Rogers, a leading communication scholar, has analyzed how innovation is diffused. His own personal story shows an early anti-technology attitude. However, through the influence of Ed Parker, a Stanford colleague, Rogers began to realize the significance of the diffusion and social impacts of new communication technologies.\(^{36}\)

My own growing commitment to the study of interactive technologies involved a trip to Stanford to talk with Parker; this resulted in an awareness of the emerging impact of communication satellites, telephony, and computer technologies, and the integration of communications and computers. After this ‘conversion’ I moved from work in TV production to doctoral studies in telecommunications at Harvard and MIT.

Communication and computer technologies are now so integrated that it is impossible to distinguish between them in many media. I have developed a model to clarify relationships among components of information technologies. (Figure 1) This model distinguishes between *design, storage, distribution,* and *interactive* technologies.

**Figure I: Information Technologies**

**Design Technologies**
Development of Creative or Informational Concepts
Design of Mediated content by Technology Professionals and Creators of Content (Informational and/or Entertainment Materials)

Storage Technologies
Film
Audio Tapes, Cassettes
Compact Discs
Videocassettes
Computer Software
Telephone Answering Systems
Videodiscs and CD Roms

Distribution Technologies
Broadcast Radio (AM, FM)
Broadcast TV (UHF, VHF)
Cable Systems
Microwave Technology
Satellites
Telephone Technology (Including Mobile Phones, Paging, Cellular)

Interactive Technologies
(These modes involve Design, Storage, and Distribution technologies)
Teleconferencing
Teletext, Videotext
Interactive Cable Mechanisms
Computer-Based Interactive Systems
Off-Site Audio/Video Feeds

It has always seemed necessary to me to separate the components or roles of communication/information technologies. Some are obviously storage items and some involve distribution. In fact, most of our attention is focused on only a few of the components: film, audio, and video storage technologies; also broadcast radio and TV and cable (distribution technologies).

New types of technologies have emerged in each of these areas. Newer storage tools include computer software, telephone answering systems, videodiscs, and CD-ROM, for example. Newer distribution technologies include microwave improvements, satellites, optical fiber, and technologies such as paging and cellular telephony. Facsimile messages also represent an exploding use of a practical tool.
Our conceptual analysis and management of the current terrain is enriched, I think, if we pay more attention than we have in the past to both design technologies and interactive technologies. As Figure 1 indicates, the design and development of content to be stored and distributed is a technology all its own. I suppose most of us call this writing.

And then there is interactivity. This category involves or integrates all the other groups – design, storage, and distribution. As these technologies converge we are reminded of Shakespeare’s description of a ‘brave new world that has such creatures in it.’ This would include video purchases (allowing us to interact with program choice more vigorously), facsimile, conferencing, varied computer-based interactive systems, and off-site audio-video feeds, which permit the aggressive interactivity of world-wide news broadcasts. And, of course, the Internet and World Wide Web.

Technological tools challenge both individuals and institutions to reach for new ideas, for exploratory skills, for higher-order thinking. A strategic tool needed for this task is collaboration.

**Institutionalizing Collaboration**

The intellectual marketplace has become more of a challenge due to the increasing amounts of information (data) and the complexity of the technological systems for processing the data. When you add the challenge of resource limitation, it seems as if the only way to respond to the converging pressures is through fierce competition – often resulting in polarization within, and between, institutions. Another way to view the situation, however, is that working smarter, not harder, can often involve working with others. Computer technology itself provides a metaphor for this approach in time sharing, a procedure allowing many people to use computer technology virtually simultaneously.

Other metaphors for this situation include the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is possible that we are approaching different formats of the concept and reality of the nation-state. Part of the defining nature of the nation-state is that it has been the source, inspiration, and container of information. Now, however, media images and computer networks override geographical boundaries. Regulatory mechanisms and parliaments of the nation-state no longer rule exclusively. Another reality is the ethnic enclave; communication technologies homogenize, but ethnicity – a type of family link – will be increasingly significant in the coming decades.

Today global economic challenges, while making people aware of the need for competitive advantage, also seem to be the direct cause of bold new collaboratives like the European Union, emerging with certainty albeit with difficulty. Even a noted authority like Peter Drucker states
that we need new economic models; the old theories are feeling the weight of increasing complexities, most of them technological. It may be that the new theoretical constructs will reflect a more conjoined world.

Technologies seem to be having a decentralizing effect on the bureaucracies of modern culture – the system or technique the French philosopher Jacques Ellul critiqued in his writings. Drucker sees a new kind of organization emerging – one with more horizontal operational structures. Replacing most of the mid-level management will be task-force teams that are fluid and comprised of experts from various areas collaborating on tasks. On the factory floor and in major corporate offices the team is already being institutionalized; *Fortune* magazine, in a cover story, wrote “the (team) phenomenon is spreading. It may (have been) the productivity breakthrough of the 1990s.” The challenge is to use technological tools that facilitate interactivity and collaboration, thus leading to greater productivity (and community).

Communication forums mean we plug in to tools such as computer-based messaging systems. The studies of California analyst Jacques Vallee demonstrate that technological forums are productive. Such forums substitute for many face-to-face meetings and allow quick response when emergency changes are required. After the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in the United States, messages were continually available on computer bulletin boards like emergency hotline, emergency planner information, and operations and maintenance information, and many others.

Mundane messages are integral to our daily planning and often the message provides greater information precision and thus improves decision-making. This also keeps us connected as individuals, as community.

Our marketplace of ideas is today more complex; information and machinery keep changing. The pace of change is a challenge and this requires new tools; many of these enabling technologies involve the telephone and computer, often linked by satellites. More important than the technology is the institutionalization of collaboration in utilizing the tools in effective ways. In an Aspen Institute study, David Bollier notes:

> The concept of information sharing is what characterizes the current situation.... That is the most noteworthy trend in the dissemination of information technologies. It is the nature of information as a resource that it is going to be shared.

I have undertaken a series of research projects in communication and collaboration, constructing a theory and related case study analysis in the telecommunications sector. My hypothesis is that:
1. Communication/computer technologies are changing rapidly
2. Entrepreneurial opportunities in this market sector are vast; and
3. To keep pace with the technological changes and market forces, we need new, *collaborative* and *dialogic* strategic planning and operational tools.

I have formulated a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of collaboration or cooperative efforts in meeting telecommunications needs and pressures. I call this concept Interactive Strategic Alliances (ISAs). Case studies under analysis from this theoretical perspective are direct broadcast satellite development; teleconferencing for meetings; international negotiations for satellite use by many nations; the co-operative communication efforts among European Union nations; and other examples.

One dramatic forum has emerged in the increasing demand for liberation politically throughout the world. Viewers connected by mass media globally have watched people power emerge in Manila, in Poland, and on the streets of Moscow. Behind the television coverage, however, large numbers of people on the street are nodes in a communication network, using telephones, computers, and fax machines, where messages cannot be controlled. This communication pattern empowers individuals and groups.

Authority, whether legitimate or not, seems to move from the top to the grass roots. Pyramid organizational and authority structures are under siege (both in Moscow and in centralized church structures in Rome); this happens, to a large degree, because people communicate easily in new and interactive ways. There are many aspects of interactive communication and collaborative structures that require more analysis and more fieldwork, both in political societies and in churches.

An interesting question concerns gender differences; are women socialized to be more collaborative than men? Is there a connection between the competitive nature of society and the fact that women have limited leadership roles to date within that society? We may begin to see the collaborative model employed more by males, thus enabling joint ownership, with increased societal effectiveness because of a greater commitment to this *mutuality* – by both females and males.

We need to study patterns of collaborative activity within groups and institutions and the regional economic *collaboratives* emerging throughout the world. We must identify the barriers to collaboration that will be troublesome in this decade when large empires will disappear but regional and ethnic strife may continue. And much work needs to be done in preserving local voices within large collaboratives – as the current arguments over globalization demonstrate.
More information is needed on economies of scale within collaboratives. We need current analysis of the uses of power and its impact on cooperatives (the concept of power-with instead of power-over). We must ask how we can design incentives for cooperative action, but we must also learn how to communicate through adversarial positions honestly arrived at. Mary Parker Follett, an organizational specialist involved in establishing the Harvard Business School a century ago, wrote “We should never allow ourselves to be bullied by an ’either-or.’ There is often the possibility of something better than either of two given alternatives.”

A Collaborative and Mediated Church

It is a challenge that our struggle to clarify models of Church occurs at a time of enormous technological and communication change. It is a challenge, but it is perhaps also a grace. A sign of this grace for me is the fact that a leading theologian like Cardinal Avery Dulles began saying decades ago that “the Church is communication.” As more members of the Church community throughout the world use and understand the varied technologies of information-sharing and interconnecting we may well empower new communities – new forms of communio.

A major theme of this author has been that interactivity inevitably and effectively removes passivity – in communication, in society, in churches. One-way structures are crumbling. Hopefully, the participatory communio ecclesiology of Vatican II documents will become more evident, instead of a pyramidal structure; otherwise, the Church will have difficulty communicating credibly in a collaborative, mediated world. Our metaphor for this communion has been the reality that, even at great cost, people have taken down a Wall in Berlin. Perhaps it is appropriate, therefore, to conclude with reflections by two German theologians.

Cardinal Walter Kasper has written in Theology and Church:

To understand the church in a new way as a communion, to live it better, and to realize it more profoundly is... more than a program for church reform. The church as a communion is a message and a promise for the people and the world of today.

And Hermann Pottmeyer adds:

The task that must be faced... is to incorporate what is still binding in reconciliatory theology into the newly acquired foundation... into a communio ecclesiology and a Christian anthropology that calls for commitment to human dignity.... The decisive question... is whether we are giving the Spirit of God enough freedom to lead the church along new paths.
Footnotes


8. Ibid.


11. Ibid., p. 10.


17. Ibid., p. 209.
18. Ibid., p. 233.
22. Ibid., p. 48.
23. Ibid., pp. 50-51.
24. Ibid., p. 63.
30. Ibid., p. 158.
32. Ibid., p. 163.
33. Ibid., p. 181.
34. Ibid., p. 196.
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41. Mary Parker Follett, *Dynamic Administration*, edited by Elliot M. Fox (London: Pitman,


44. Pottmeyer, “A New Phase,” p. 34.

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Bridges Link Communication & Theology

By Frances Forde Plude

[This presentation was the annual Siena Lecture at Notre Dame College, Cleveland.]

Prologue

My personal introduction to the brave new world of Communication Theology occurred in a lovely setting: an Italian villa in suburban Rome. I was invited there to join a small group of theologians and communication scholars and practitioners -- to spend a week together with about a dozen of these individuals from all over the globe.

Our task was to respond to several commissioned papers and to think together, have our meals together, and generally conceptualize together, around the specific topic of Communication and Ecclesiology. This is the special branch of theology dealing with what the term church means today and how our understanding of church has developed from scripture and tradition. Well, this was exciting! I was told our villa looked out toward the spot where Cicero's villa used to be. I could not help thinking how much he would approve of communicators being in the neighborhood since this was his specialty too.

This seminar reached some interesting conclusions about how the theological enterprise and the field of communication studies should interact. As our week concluded, we committed to homework assignments: various individuals agreed to develop one aspect of our material as a chapter in a book. This book, The Church and Communication, has been published by Sheed and Ward as part of their series on Communication, Culture & Theology I began to develop, in that Italian villa, a thesis that the blossoming interactive communication technologies (which I had studied at Harvard and MIT) were a metaphor for a more interactive, dialogic concept of church. That thesis is developed systematically in my chapter in this book entitled "Interactive Communications in the Church".

So, one source of our Communication Theology intellectual enterprise has been multiple seminars held every other year for more than a decade in Rome. These seminars have addressed varied theological topics (moral theology, ecclesiology, etc.) -- all linked to communication, all providing forums of thought where theologians and communication scholars covered both areas of inquiry, building bridges for a new field -- Communication Theology. We were not self-consciously aware of creating a new field, but it began to happen.
Another obvious source is the publication of books -- creating a "literature" for this burgeoning field. The Rome seminars and the publications still tended to speak of communication and theology. However a new development here in the U.S. began to change that.

A colleague of mine, Father Bob Bonnot, began to strategize with me to develop a communication and theology seminar at the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, known as CTSA. When we prepared a proposal for CTSA officials they recognized the importance of this and supported the plan. Bob and I have organized this seminar with each year featuring different speakers and papers. Father Paul Soukup, S.J. and I delivered the papers at the Baltimore convention a year ago. These are featured as the opening article in the November 1995 New Theology Digest.

One year the CTSA paper was presented by Father Randy Sachs, S.J. of the Weston School of Theology. In San Diego, the presenters were Terrance Tilley and Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, both then located at the University of Dayton. Tilley is the author of a book entitled Story Theology. Another year the topic was trinitarian theology and communication. Still another topic was biblical storytelling in a digital age.

One year our seminar audience included a former president of CTSA, and Edmund Arens, a CTSA member from Germany. Arens and I had a follow-up meeting and met again when I was in Germany that summer -- to confer on communication theology principles.

So, we became a fixture at the Catholic Theological Society; I was invited to join America's leading theologians as a member of CTSA; we now have an international awareness at our seminars; and we will soon become more ecumenical than we are, inviting colleagues from other religious groups to contribute to this growing Communication Theology field; and we are developing a literature for this field.

Bob Bonnot and I have also adopted the practice of convening a small group of theologians and communication scholars to think jointly about the upcoming topic for the CTSA convention. The speakers thus have the benefit of this brainstorming session as they develop their papers. We did this last year at St. Louis University for Randy Sachs and the eminent scholar Walter Ong joined us for the weekend discussions. Later, a group gathered at the University of Dayton to confer with Terrance Tilley and Sister Angela Ann Zukowski on their presentation. These interactive sessions provide another forum for interchange between theologians and communication theorists and practitioners.

Incidentally, we are now committed to the title Communication Theology. We no longer speak of "communication and theology" or "a theology of communications". Like Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology, we are developing a theology that totally integrates communication
theory into it -- Communication Theology. With this Siena Lecture, and the development of a Communication Theology course here at Notre Dame College, the college makes a unique contribution to this intellectual enterprise.

**Theories of Human Communication**

When we speak about integrating communication and theology, we are not talking just about TV programs or even about the impact of new telecommunication technologies, although this latter is a topic very important to my own research and study. As Stephen Littlejohn points out in his text *Theories of Human Communication*, communication theory began after World War I, with research into propaganda and public opinion studies. It was soon enriched by the emerging fields of sociology and social psychology and by new technologies developed in education. After World War II, social science became recognized as a discipline and communication studies resides under this social science umbrella.

Our communication theory is primarily Western, a limitation I will address below when I speak of communication bridges to be built in the area of spirituality; this is clearly a place where Eastern thought has already had an enormous impact, especially in the writings of Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths.

There are roughly five genres of communication theory. *Structural and functional theories* are rooted in *linguistics*, the organization of *language and social systems*, and in *biology*. The second genre consists of *cognitive and behavioral communication theories* which come out of *psychology*, like behaviorism and these theories focus on *the individual*.

Thirdly, there are *interactional theories of communication* -- viewing social life as a process of interactions. I often comfortably reside within this camp with my own studies of the impact of new interactive technologies of communication (the telephone, computer networks, the fax machine, etc.).

The fourth genre consists of *interpretive theories of communication* including phenomenology (the experience of the person) and *hermeneutics* (the process of interpretation). And, finally, there are *critical theories of communication* with their commentaries on society and social practice. Marxism and feminism are key examples of this genre. An exciting new area of communication studies is influenced by recent developments in *anthropology*. These writings explore the interplay between communication and our various *cultures*.

Obviously, there is a lot more here than TV programs! And when I speak of the integration of communication and theology, it is clear with the above overview of communication studies that
theology simply should not be done today without integrating the above insights, garnered during eight decades of formal research and practice.

Theological Voices

Avery Dulles, S.J

In 1974 the American Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles published a work entitled *Models of the Church*. This work, later updated, gave us an analytical structure for our thinking about what the concept of "church" embraces. Dulles spoke of models of the church as *institution*, as *sacrament*, as *herald*, as *servant*, as *mystical communion* (Dulles, 1978).

This was a handy conceptual tool, but Dulles himself urged us not to get too attached to the tool because each *model* or view of church was incomplete by itself. There is a temptation to get attached to the model we feel most comfortable with and stay put there. Some professors have even stated to me that once a theology student gets into the Dulles model mode, it's difficult to get them to do other creative conceptualizing on church because they are unable to think outside of the Dulles model structure. Dulles later added another model -- church as *community of disciples* -- so obviously we need to keep thinking beyond existing model structures. Incidentally, in a later book, *Models of Revelation*, Dulles used the same methodology to examine varied aspects of the revealed message of Christian faith, including Christ Himself, along with church tradition and teaching. His models here include revelation as *doctrine*, as *history*, as *inner experience*, as *dialectical presence* and as *new awareness*. (Dulles, 1985)

I return to these Dulles theological models because Dulles has long been aware of the significance of communication in our theology, especially our theology of church. As early as 1971, even before he published his famous models, Dulles delivered an address to Bishops at the Loyola University Communications Institute, in which he uttered the line we communicators treasure: he said, "The Church is communications" (*Catholic Mind*, October 1971, pp 6-16).

In another work, *The Reshaping of Catholicism*, published in 1988, Dulles has a chapter entitled, "The Church and Communications: Vatican II and Beyond", and in this chapter he offers some general reflections on communications and then revisits his models of church, examining just how each different model seems to employ a different communication approach. Samples of this matchup between models and communication styles will give us a sense of what Dulles is proposing. If we consider the model of church as *hierarchical institution*, for example, it seems clear the *printed word* is a major communication channel for this model. Print communication allows us to "package" authoritative teachings in a way that sees most of the church faithful as learners -- much like students studying text and taking exams on the content.
If we think of the model of church as *herald* -- designed to proclaim the "good news" of scripture and tradition to the world, then mass media are seen as tools to evangelize and we have had numerous examples of this model and communication merge, ranging from Pat Robertson to Mother Angelica.

The Dulles work on church and communications stands tall in the development of the field of Communication Theology. There are some aspects of his thinking, however, that I see as somewhat limiting. Let me address a few.

In the first place, most of the time the thinking Dulles does on communication relates almost entirely to mass media forms of communication -- print, TV, etc. He begins to expand upon this limited view when he speaks in this specific text about a secular dialogic theology -- somewhat better suited to our post-literate culture, where God is to be found in the great events of secular history, where revelation is a dimension of our contemporary experience. Dulles notes that the Second Vatican Council "did not fully embrace this type of radical or secular theology, but it provided openings for it" (p 11).

When Dulles reflects upon communication in this secular-dialogic view, he tends to speak of talk shows, interviews, etc. -- all radio/TV mass media channels. However, as we all now recognize, the major dialogic tools of communication are the interactive ones -- computer networks, like the Internet, telephone technologies, like faxes and cellular phones. These communication channels are basically two way and go way beyond TV talk shows to facilitate a secular dialogic theology. And they are more available for our use: we all communicate by telephone and very few of us will ever be on a radio or TV talk show.

In addition, as mentioned above, the field of communication studies includes many other theoretical paradigms; it is not limited to defining channels of communication, such as radio and TV. It includes studies on language, myth, symbol -- varied types of communication as shared meaning. The field includes organizational communication research studies, along with theory in interpersonal and intercultural communication. Dulles was the first to speak authoritatively about the role of communication, but it was "communication *and* theology" -- two disparate fields interacted upon and by one another. Now, several decades later, we have a more integrated view of these two fields -- linked by bridges upon which theologians and communication scholars can travel and think about a vision of theology *mediated* by communication studies, theology *permeated* by the research and realities of a world bathed in, and graced by, our understanding of the communication process and its impact upon our postmodern culture.
Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J.

The field of Communication Theology has received a double gift from the theologian Elizabeth Johnson. As President-elect of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Johnson encouraged us to develop Communication Theology seminars within the CTSA convention she convened. In addition, of course, we have Johnson's own scholarship in Christology and in her recent book *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. As Leo O'Donovan, the President of Georgetown University said about her book: "Elizabeth Johnson seeks a liberating language for women and men to use together in addressing the mystery of God" (book cover).

As Johnson explores speech about God, she visits feminist theology and critical discourse about God, basic linguistic options, women's experience, scripture, classical theology, female metaphors -- moving well beyond the typical discussion of inclusive language. It is patently clear, of course, when you are speaking of language, of discourse, of shared experience, you are speaking about communication.

I cannot here delineate the various connections between Johnson's theological insights and communication; in fact, this clearly is an area requiring more systematic articulation. It may be Johnson was unaware of specific conceptual bridges between theology and communication as she wrote *She Who Is*; but any linguistic analysis is going to overlap on to communication studies almost immediately. Johnson discusses "expanding the treasury of metaphor" in a *Commonweal* magazine article (January 29, 1993, p 9). In this reference (and in the follow-up "Letters to the Editor" exchange of March 26, 1993), Johnson refers often to language and symbol. She notes: The women's movement in civil society and the church shines a spotlight on the exclusion of women from public discourse and decision making and their resulting absence from the formation of cultural and theological symbols (p 9). would suggest the "formation of cultural and theological symbols" is primarily a "communication and culture" exercise. Johnson reminds us of Martin Buber's observation that images of the divine "come into being not simply as a projection of the imagination but as an awakening from the deep abyss of human existence in real encounter with divine power and glory" (p 10).

Human constructs and language cannot express adequately the mystery of God; our language about God is not literal, but analogical. However, she notes "the fact that the Christian community ordinarily speaks about God in the image of a ruling man" ... reflect(s) a patriarchal arrangement of the world ... (with) implicit stress on solitariness, superiority, and omnipotent power" (p 12). In calling for more inclusive "God-talk" Johnson notes: "... religions die when their lights fail, when they lose the power to connect people's current experience of the world with the ultimate mystery of God" (March 26, 1993, p 30). I would argue, although we have not built this bridge yet, the theology of "God-talk" should benefit from, and be infused by, what we have learned in decades of communication research about language, myth, and symbol.
David Tracy

Another theologian who speaks of the analogical imagination is David Tracy, whose book by that title has been a challenge to our theological paradigms. Tracy notes "... a distinguishing characteristic of the contemporary period in religious studies and theology is the continuing recovery of the symbolic imagination... those several theologies which employ story, metaphor, image, symbol, myth, and ritual as their central categories, the emergence of the centrality of the imagination for the study of religion..." He mentions, for example, "the imaginative genius of a genuine storyteller with a theological bent such as Elie Wiesel".

Tracy speaks of the three publics in which theologians are involved: the wider society; the academy; and the church. He is especially aware of the uses of modern technology in these realms. I was told by a colleague that one paper by Tracy in Rome dealt extensively with communication technologies. This colleague talked with Tracy about the growing development of Communication Theology, so he is aware of this work. In his book, *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy refers to "what John Courtney Murray named 'civic discourse' or Walter Lippmann articulated as 'a public philosophy'" (p 9), what, I would suggest, Richard John Neuhaus called "the public square." Tracy adds his voice to the many who call for rationality in the public discourse of modern society.

I suggest we must articulate and institutionalize the role of communication principles and technologies in this debate. We have radio and TV talk shows and we have Internet forums and E-mail messages. We continue to need thoughtful analysis of how all this impacts our public philosophy. I applaud the fact that David Tracy is joining others in becoming aware of how critical an understanding of communication is. Once again, however, I would warn against an exclusive emphasis on media channels of communication. Decades of communication studies and theory-building should play a key role in our Communication Theology forums.

Hermann J. Pottmeyer

Professor Pottmeyer, one of Europe's leading theologians, attended the seminar in Rome where I first began to dialogue about the theology of church and communication. He has continued to assist me in clarifying my own thought about bridges between theology and communication. (Of course, he bears no blame for any of my conceptual inadequacies). Pottmeyer has a specialist's knowledge of the first Vatican Council; this gives him a perspective on the second Vatican Council that is both historical and theological. In our Rome seminar he provided us with a conceptual model of Vatican II's theology of church. This is primarily known as *communio* (communion or community)
We have generally heard this model referred to as "the church as the people of God". Pottmeyer calls *communio* a *leitmotif* -- a norm or criterion -- for the church, her structures, and relations. It has, he says, a theological and anthropological meaning. To clarify our thinking there in Rome he cited three theological dimensions of *communio*. The first is reflected in communion and communication within the church; the second is communication aimed outward to all people; and the third is the self-communication of God in history.

With this as a context, Pottmeyer's chapter in our follow up seminar book (*The Church and Communication*), is entitled "Dialogue as a Model for Communication in the Church". He notes here that the "word 'dialogue' as a description of communication within the Church is new. It is not found in pre-conciliar ecclesiology whose key words were 'jurisdiction' and 'obedience'".

Pottmeyer notes there is a tendency to return to one-way communication in the church (mainly because the "new awareness that 'we are all the Church' creates fear in some people") (p 97). There is a comfortable connection between Pottmeyer's chapter on dialogue and my own chapter in the same book on "Interactive Communications in the Church." My own concept, views newer interactive technologies (telephone technologies, computer networks, varied information systems) as an infrastructure that can facilitate the dialogue Pottmeyer speaks of. I will address some of these more specifically below.

Here in this text, Pottmeyer refreshes our memory on early church history. He notes that structurally "the early Church was a communion of local churches... (where) consensus developed. It took place first among local churches and ultimately within the entire Church" (p 99). He adds: "Indeed, the consensus of the universal Church regarding doctrinal decisions was, from the outset, the most important criterion in determining whether a doctrinal statement was to belong to the Church's binding tradition of faith... canon law adopted the secular Roman legal maxim: 'What concerns all must be discussed and approved by all'" (p 100).

Pottmeyer himself notes: "... modern communications media are extremely important in this kind of consultative process" (p 101). He gives as examples the process the U.S. bishops have used in developing their pastoral letters on peace and on the economy -- submitting drafts of their documents and inviting members of the church community to comment upon them.

Pottmeyer concludes: "The important goal of global dialogue, on which the future of humanity depends, will not be served by a relapse into pre-conciliar one-way communication". (p 102).

Recently a national referendum has been conducted in Germany where thousands of German Catholics have signed their names to papers, indicating their desire to communicate with Church authorities on various issues, especially the ordination of women and mandated celibacy for priests. Many, including Pottmeyer, would agree that we cannot develop church teaching only
by conducting public opinion polls. The German referendum movement, however, signals a
desperate desire on the part of the general church community to dialogue with church leadership.
Networked by modern communication technologies, with wide coverage by the mass media, this
desire to dialogue can no longer be ignored.

Structures that facilitate dialogue include consultative boards, wider lay participation in decision-
making, and bishops’ conferences in nations around the world. As people of all faiths become
more interconnected through communication technologies, it will be important to encourage
thoughtful forums where the theology of communio can facilitate consensus.

**Communication Theology Bridges**

I would like to conclude with some reflections of my own about areas where I see the possibility
of some bridge-building between theologians and communication scholars and practitioners. Many, many so-called bridges could be cited.

As we move into the 21st century, I plan to invest a percentage of my own communication
research, writing and speaking into this bridge-building enterprise. As part of this commitment, I
am working with the U.S. bishops to develop a national, telecommunications strategic plan, and
working with local dioceses and religious congregations to adapt to emerging communication
and information technologies. To be credible in today’s mediated or wired world, systems of
belief must link to communication principles and practices.

**Interactivity in Communication Styles**

As I mentioned above, there is a comfortable fit between the Vatican II communio theology and
modern interactive communication infrastructures. Over one hundred years ago, with the
invention of the telephone, we began to be a wired world. You simply cannot stop people from
interacting with one another. Our mass media have created shared experiences globally and now
our interactive tools (computers, cellular phones, faxes) link us in two-way modes. We can talk
back!

Some of my own research in this area -- connecting with the thought of Lonergan, Dulles,
Rahner and others -- is in *The Church and Communication*. My chapter probes: emerging
theories of discourse; how communio ecclesiology and discourse theory converge and interact;
case studies; the implications of freedom and autonomy; and new roles for the laity.

The noted communications scholar Everett Rogers claims that interactivity calls for a whole new
epistemology of communications. (Rogers, 1986). We have, in the past, concentrated in our
research on the *content* or on media *effects*. Our analytical focus needs to move to
"communication-as-exchange," to the process of interaction. Once communication *interactivity* becomes institutionalized, organizational hierarchies become flattened. This has happened to large corporations like General Motors and it is having an impact on governmental and religious bureaucracies. Communication flows are now horizontal to a large degree. Vertical (top-down) communication becomes less relevant. Major information-as-power shifts occur.

It seems the theology and the technology here are moving in tandem. It is a "bridge" area where much more thinking between theologians and communicators will be helpful in assessing how to handle all of it.

**Storytelling and Narrative Theology**

Theologians are aware of the differentiation between *propositional* theology and *narrative* theology. The first elaborates propositions as doctrines, the second recognizes that, as Terrence Tilley says, "the great (religious) stories ... are celebrated in various sacraments, narrated in many texts, and sung in different hymns" (p 12). He adds: "For a Christian narrative theology, the first task is to uncover the stories which show what the Christian key-words mean... (p 11). "The second task of a Christian narrative theology is to transform creatively (when necessary) the narratives of the tradition, ... recognizing that new ways of expressing the tradition must be discovered".

Elie Wiesel said God made us because God loves stories! The sacred scriptures are stories and the German scholar, Edmund Arens, has reviewed the parables of Christ in the light of the Habermas "Theory of Communicative Action". As I mentioned above, Tilley and Angela Ann Zukowski have developed these theology/communication connections in a paper delivered at the Communication Theology Group at the Catholic Theology Society of America (CTSA) after a meeting at the University of Dayton to brainstorm the concepts.

In a wonderful book entitled *The Producers' Medium*, Horace Newcomb analyzes television as, primarily, a body of stories -- entertainment stories, advertising stories, and news stories. Another critic has defined our TV sets as the "cool fire" we gather around to share stories. There is an obvious overlap between narrative theology and our mediated storytelling.

**God's Self-communication**

Karl Rahner has interpreted divine revelation or salvation as God's self-communication. The Catholic doctrine of the Trinity is a short expression for this mystery, according to Sachs (p 11). Catherine Mowry LaCugna's study of the Trinity has renewed theological interest in this mystery and we have begun to discuss bridges that look at the Trinity as the self-communication of God,
both in the Godhead mystery and in salvation history. This was explored by Randy Sachs in his CTSA presentation.

"The Cloud of Unknowing"

A famous spirituality classic speaks of prayer as moving into "a cloud of unknowing," a wordless communication with God that goes beyond concept. My own interest in contemplative forms of prayer has moved me to explore the need for silence in a media-overload world. I have worked with Trappist monks, including the writer Abbot Thomas Keating, in what is called "centering prayer" practice. I believe much can be done to build bridges between the theology of spirituality and communication studies. This is one area, as I mentioned above, where our Communication Theology is, quite naturally, linked to Eastern forms of meditation.

**Additional Conceptual Architecture**

In conclusion, I will mention only briefly my perspective on areas that need attention as we move forward in bridge-building between theologians and communication scholarship and practice. There is continually a need to remind those in both fields that we are talking about the whole intellectual structure of communication studies, not just mass media, or new technologies. And our project needs to be ecumenical, working with theologians from Protestant, Jewish, and Eastern religious thought, and practice.

It will be interesting to study "communication flows" within and outside of churches. What can we learn, for example, about the way communication flowed on the discussion within the Catholic Church on preparing a pastoral on the concerns of women? This process was finally dropped for various reasons, not unrelated to the communication process.

We also need to be more inclusive, culturally, in our Communication Theology development. I have a feeling communication studies can assist greatly as we recognize the need for deeper understanding of Islamic culture. We invite all interested parties to join us in this venture.

As Edna St. Vincent Millay puts it:

> Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour,  
> Rains from the sky a meteoric shower  
> Of facts ... they lie unquestioned,  
> uncombined.  
> Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill  
> Is daily spun, but there exists no loom  
> To weave it into fabric...
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Communication Interactivity: A Sign Of The Times

By Frances Forde Plude

[This paper was delivered at St. Paul’s University, Ottawa and at a conference in Rome.]

My own personal media journey and its faith witness took a dramatic turn two decades ago. At that time, I was producing television programs and had a weekly TV show of my own in the Boston market. It was grace that helped me perceive what has become, I believe, one of the “signs of the times.”

Because twenty years ago I realized that bold new communication technologies would re-design our environment and, to a degree, our personhood. At that time, the excitement was about communication satellites and cable TV. Computers were still mainframes, the personal computer market was undeveloped, and the term Internet was not in use. In dialogue with several colleagues, however, I began to realize that huge amounts of money would be made as these newer telecommunication tools developed. And I began to worry about who would advocate for the nonprofit sector – for schools, hospitals, social welfare groups, for developing nations, for women and children, for the poor.

Directly as a result of this concern, my husband, who was still alive then, took a second job and I took three years off to do doctoral studies in telecommunications and public policy at Harvard University, with accompanying studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). One of the most important things I learned at Harvard was that the telephone (instead of mass media) would be the cornerstone of the Information Age. As a result of this insight my passion for interactivity began. I read Ithiel de Sola Pool’s work The Social Uses of the Telephone. I saw evidence all around me that people spend a lot of time conducting personal and business matters on the phone. I knew even then that we would become a mediated world.

I did not know computer networks would be the infrastructure. I did not know it would be called the Internet or the World Wide Web. I did not know about URLs or push technology. But I knew that if people could communicate easily with one another there would be no stopping them. The telephone had already demonstrated that for over one hundred years. Once I saw the power of network interaction, the increasing ease of dialogue, the attraction of talking-back, I knew this was a genie that could never be put back into the bottle.

Premise and Key Principles

The premise I will develop here is this: the foundation of our media studies as we move into the 21st century should be on the process of interactivity in media. I see the Internet as a mass
medium and an interactive one-on-one and an interactive small-group medium. However, interactivity is one source of its power and a major reason for its popularity with humanity.

Some have spoken of the liminal quality of cyberspace – providing a powerful pull toward Internet use. This recalls the communication-and-culture writings of analyst James Carey (2) who says our studies are moving from the “transportation” model (of sending messages) to a ritual model of communication. Instead of processing messages, often aimed at manipulation (as in advertising), communication becomes shared beliefs, both sign and symbol. (One can see how this latter communication theory is demonstrated in Star Wars and Star Trek cultures). And another clearly interactive culture is the electronic game industry which had industry sales of $5.5 billion in the U.S. in 1998, according to Time magazine (May 10, 1999, p 50). Video games are the most popular form of entertainment after TV.

Current research suggests that even in a broadcast or cable TV program, certainly in film, the real power of any narrative is that audiences do meaning making as they interact with these stories. George Gerbner, another communication analyst, suggested that media have replaced institutionalized religion as the locale where humans process meaning in their lives.

Lilly has sponsored research at the University of Colorado, Boulder, directed by Dr. Stewart Hoover and his associate Dr. Lynn Schofield Clark. The project involves a field study of sixty households interviewed in depth, with group and individual follow-ups. A different interview instrument is used for youth. The study is “mapping” the material and visual culture in each household. A basic question is: how do people use media resources to process cultural and religious identity and meaning?

Each family is unique, of course, but the researchers are finding some are suffused by media; they use various media a lot and their lives are permeated by conversations about media events and stories. Some families, however, are differentiated from the media; these families feel they should control their use of media because there is much that is bad within the media sphere. (My own guess is that similar differences would be found if Internet families and individual users were mapped). The Boulder researchers were interested in how gender, age, economic, and educational level affect media reception and attitudes.

Some tentative concepts emerged. There appears to be evidence that media and religion are converging. What each sphere contains is meaning. Media seem to inform and reinforce shared beliefs (e.g., belief in angels, aliens, the supernatural, existence of evil, etc.) And media artifacts seem to have an important function as objects that ground identity; they help people define themselves and converse about their world.
This research was of great interest to the International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture. Professor Hoover served as Chair of this ecumenical think tank which links scholars and practitioners globally around these three intersecting areas of study. I was, at one point, invited to join this small group of communication scholars. With assistance from the field of anthropology and the cultural-studies approach to communication, we are beginning to see a more interactive communication process at work, even among viewers of movies and TV.

Other media have their interactive dimension also. People can take charge of their media experiences by time-shifting with a telephone-answering system and by recording TV programs and recording or streaming video movies and other programs. These latter media have been extremely popular because they allow people to interact with them – to manage these media in their own way. Another popular media tool that allows user interaction is the TV remote control which has made “zapping” or muting a part of video viewing.

One of my own special areas of work for a decade has been the interaction of theology and communication studies. As these two fields interact, we will have a new integrated body of thought – Communication Theology – replicating the integration of social science theory and theology which has already given birth to Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology.

My goal in this paper is to highlight four aspects of the interactivity challenge:

1. why interactivity is a “sign of the times”
2. the potential impact of this two-way process on our sense of the self
3. the role of interactivity in the formation of community
4. equity issues in a global interactive infrastructure

After raising these issues, I will cite some specific examples of interactivity or dialogue-in-action. And I will conclude with several specific recommendations.

I have found two female scholars especially helpful as I reflect upon the Internet and these four issues: Sherry Turkle, at MIT, and Margaret Wertheim, author of the highly acclaimed book *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*. Incidentally, I am, frankly, chagrined at the lack of female voices asked to participate when communication and religion issues are discussed. I have spoken at two media conferences recently (including Salamanca, Spain) where a small percentage of the speakers happen to be female. I know of a U.S. technology and church conference sponsored by the Catholic Church where there was a deliberate exclusion of female participants.

For me this is not primarily an issue of justice for women or an issue of political correctness. The fact is the challenges facing us – in cyberspace for example – are so great that this will demand the best (and the most innovative) talent we have available. As women around the world become
educated and liberated, they have both the experience and the fresh viewpoints to resolve telecommunication issues by helping us to “think outside of the box.”

We are impoverished in our analysis if we do not include voices such as those I have mentioned. Others include Deborah Tannen, the late Mary Parker Follett’s work, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Lynn Schofield Clark, and Jessica Lipnack, to mention just a few. These experts can enhance our own reading and should be noted as some of the female scholars available for anyone planning future communication conferences. It would be helpful if we could gather background summaries of such experts at a Website so they could become more active in our analysis of communication and interactivity.

**Interactive Issues as Signs of the Times**

I was asked to address the questions: Why witness? For what purpose? What are the revelations of faith and communication? I have spoken of this topic in terms of the “signs of the times.” We are all blessed to be living and laboring in interesting times. My own energy and enthusiasm are fueled by two major events which have unfolded in my own lifetime: the Second Vatican Council and the growth of the computer network. Both events offer extraordinary gifts. Each also presents many challenges as we struggle to implement these gifts. So I am not the only one who was called (two decades ago); you have all been called too – to invest your own communication and technological (and theological) gifts to building the kingdom that is to come, the one we pray for every time we say, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.”

I have always been intrigued personally by medieval culture – a time of Christendom when cathedrals and Christian art flourished, when the entire societal infrastructure was Christian, even with its bad judgment calls on the Crusades, and, later, on Galileo and Joan of Arc, among others. However, God did not call us forth into medieval culture. God apparently wants us to work for the Kingdom of God in the age of the computer, in a postmodern culture when religious belief is under siege, in an age of liberation movements. We do not have a choice about this; it is the hand we were dealt in this card game. (Incidentally, Margaret Wertheim sees interesting parallels between cyberspace and the world of Dante; we certainly do not have to abandon our Christian perspective when we become interactive cyber participants.

We can easily establish the fact that dialogic networks permeate our culture. We can reflect, as a *Time* magazine cover story did recently in the wake of the Colorado school tragedy, that every day 14 million U.S. teenagers head off to school and most of these teens will daily log on to the Internet. This number has doubled in the last two years alone. (May 10, 1999, p. 38) Without submitting to excessive hype we must acknowledge that the growth of the Internet seems to indicate that it is meeting human needs – personal, social, economic.
A May 1999 Harvard Magazine cover story entitled “Society On-line” cites repercussions:

- the impact of the Internet’s modular construction (decentralized)
- a massive shift of power from sellers to buyers
- people spending a lot of time on-line are more depressed than average
- the interconnectivity (with others) is what is new
- there is a need to be guided through cyberspace (like a helpful librarian)
- technology is popular if it helps us achieve values (reaching our children)
- a major shift is occurring in channels of distribution

The Internet and Our Sense of Self

I have long been interested in the impact of interactivity on community, but it seems practical to examine the self in relation to computer interaction first; then one can reflect upon the self-in-communion-with-others.

The MIT scholar Sherry Turkle has been studying the relationship of computers and children and adults for several decades. Turkle is a licensed clinical psychologist and she offers sophisticated data on the impact of the computer network on the sense of self. Her earlier book, The Second Self, dealt with humans interacting with the computer itself; her more recent study, Life on the Screen, examines scientifically, the impact of network interaction on the self.

Turkle’s social science training has included graduate work in sociology, anthropology, and personality psychology. She has been a practicing psychotherapist for two decades. She has studied the impact of the computer on children in the U.S., in Great Britain, and in Russia. In 1992 her studies turned almost exclusively to the study of the impact of the Internet on self-identity and Life on the Screen examines aspects of self such as the discontents of virtuality, gender troubles, and the identity crisis in the age of the Internet. This is a good place to admit that it is probably too early to really know what impact the computer network is having on us as individuals and as society. However, people like Turkle who spend decades in gathering data through personal interviews and ethnological field studies can guide us. I recommend that religious institutions invest time and resources in this kind of analysis if we are to be pastoral in an age of interactive communication.

There are numerous insights in Turkle’s book. I would like to focus on two: the impact on self-identity when one “lives” for extended periods in the simulated interactive environment of the Internet and, secondly, the issue of power versus responsibility in cyberspace. According to Turkle, we are negotiating new boundaries of human existence as we move easily in and out of cyberspace. Working with children, whom she says are “harbingers of our cultural mindset”, she
notes that a decade ago children psychologized the machine as they questioned whether the machine was “alive.”

A decade later, she notes that children now know that computers are not alive, that they are just machines. The boundary line between computers and humans is clear to them. However, now they are comfortable with the idea that computer, these inanimate objects, can both think and have a personality. Therefore, the computer and its world seem fitting partners for dialogue and relationship (perhaps like dolls and toy soldiers have been for previous generations). Now there is a growing comfort with this alternative “existence.” Cycling through cyberspace is impacting the way we see ourselves – rapid alternatives in identity, changing lifestyle (even gender) as we relate to others. Eliza Doolittle’s character convinced us that you can become what you pretend to be. The simulated environment can become a medium for working with the materials of a person’s life.

This is quite a different “discourse” with self. This kind of interaction has psychological (and pastoral) implications. It is the stuff of fantasy, which has long been a part of human existence, but this fantasy is so real!

Turkle notes the relationship of this new sense-of-self to the writings of Robert Lifton in The Protean Self. A unitary view of self is possible in traditional cultures with stable symbols. But this has broken down. Lifton says we can react in several ways. We can insist dogmatically on unity. (This is a current challenge for the Catholic Church, for example, in a world of diversity where 70% of all Catholics now reside outside of Europe and North America, and many “local theologies” are emerging). Or, says Lifton, we can return to systems of belief which can lead to fundamentalism, or embrace the idea of the fragmented self, with fluidity, “with no moral content and sustainable form.” (Turkle worries this is rampant in cyberspace).

However, Lifton sees another alternative – the Protean self – named after the god Proteus. This self is multiple but integrated, healthy, grounded in coherence and moral outlook. Turkle notes “a more fluid sense of self allows a greater capacity for acknowledging diversity. (p 261) I wonder if this fluid sense of self may eventually facilitate the breakdown of global patriarchal power.

Of course, as humans move into the cyberspace realm, they bring their humanity with them – even if they simulate a new persona. Thus, there are many battles on the Internet, extending the conflict that is at the heart of most video games and much of real life. Indeed, some research indicates that some who move into simulated environments in cyberspace are lonely and feel powerless. The search for connection can be expressed in positive or negative ways. This keeps many females away from such environments. Rage against women often erupts there, but at the same time, as somewhat-shy people interact with females online or even impersonate them, they
can begin to understand what being a woman involves in a patriarchal world. Turkle notes “the challenge is to integrate some meaningful personal responsibility in virtual environments” instead of using virtuality as an excuse for irresponsibility or excessively aggressive behavior.

I find the concluding thoughts of Turkle extremely rich:

As we stand on the boundary between the real and the virtual, our experience recalls what the anthropologist Victor Turner termed a liminal moment, a moment of passage when new cultural symbols and meanings can emerge. Liminal moments are times of tension, extreme reactions, and great opportunity. In our time, we are simultaneously flooded with predictions of doom and predictions of imminent utopia. We live in a crucible of contradictory experience. When Turner talked about liminality, he understood it as a transitional state – but living with flux may no longer be temporary. (p 268)

She adds: “Our need for a practical philosophy of self-knowledge has never been greater as we struggle to make meaning from our lives on the screen” (p 269).

**Interactivity and the Formation of Community**

Now we consider the impact of interactive networks on building community. Establishing the Kingdom of God probably requires building healthy communities – in families, among different ethnic and religious groups, among nations. One recent highly praised and thoughtful analysis of the Internet is Margaret Wertheim’s book *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*. Wertheim traces theories of space through various ages and cultures, including our own. Her basic premise is that Dante was the “first cartographer to draw the map of soul-space” but the Enlightenment and the development of modern science have contributed to our current age of materiality and consumerism – where, some analysts note, even religion has become commodified. Wertheim worries that, unlike Dante’s vision, there is a lack of directionality in cyberspace. “This limitless freedom of movement is a prime fantasy of late twentieth-century cosmology” (p 187).

She is also concerned about other aspects of techno-utopian space: that many cyberspace areas emphasize invention, discovery, new frontiers (like NASA’s space community, for example) in contrast to the growing awareness that these have often fed imperialism and colonialism in past eras. Cyberspace can offer interaction and communities where one can demand (or design) perks, but the individual can remain free from responsibility for their own actions or their interaction with the larger group. This may be a tendency of religion-on-line groups, for example – “feel-good” spirituality without real-world obligation or constraint.
Wortheim notes, realistically, that we can over-state the potential of the Internet in forming community. In fact, many of the groups on the Internet are exclusive, even somewhat imperialistic. Like 17th century coffeehouses, cybergroups start out allowing varied individuals to share ideas, but they can become exclusive. Like these earlier coffeehouses, women are not welcome in some groups and, in fact, are sometimes abused. Then how can the Internet contribute to the global community we long for and that interactive technology seems to offer? Certainly millions are linked daily through E-mail messages, and chat rooms and newsgroups. And at any moment thousands of individuals are “residing” in multi-user domains (MUDs) or simulated environments they have created.

Wertheim looks beyond the utopian view of cyberspace to a deeper value – the notion of cyberspace as a network of relationships. She adds that “cyberspace can serve as a metaphor for community, because human communities also are bound together by networks of relationships: the kinship networks of our families, the social networks of our friends, and the professional networks of our work associates, and the networks without and between faith communities. Within any modern community there are also networks of interrelated businesses, networks of social services, networks of churches, networks of health care providers, and so on” (p 301).

I might add, incidentally, the relational aspect of interactive communication is one of the reasons I have found this concept so empowering – for individuals and for faith communities. I do not consider it a coincidence that this relational aspect is especially valued by two analysts who happen to be female.

I have explored in my own writings the significance of the dialogic in the ecclesiology of Vatican II and some specific examples of interactive teleconferencing in the U.S. Catholic Church. Recently at a conference at the University of Salamanca in Spain I explored the impact of interactivity on communication flows and organizational structures, including religious organizations. I have been engaged in many workshops with church leadership of various denominations as we think together about being pastoral in a dialogic age. None of this is easy.

We need a philosophy of discourse. We need to implement the theology of dialogue called for by the bishops at Vatican II (GS #92). Church groups (and the media) should commit to the dialogic/interactive/participative task. We should provide the leadership and the tools so the 21st century will have an architecture and an aesthetic of dialogue – just as cathedrals stand as symbols of the way earlier centuries spoke of their faith and their communal commitment.

The communication scholar, Deborah Tannen of Georgetown University published a book entitled The Argument Culture. Professor Tannen notes our public squares are full of discordant, argumentative voices. Will the Internet facilitate dialogue in general or will it consist mostly of robotic space wars and spamming?
Another major challenge is that of equity. It is certainly possible to address this issue systematically. In the U.S. as telephone usage spread a policy decision was made that all citizens had a right to telephone access, not just the wealthy or those living in big cities. Our telephony economic infrastructure was constructed so that expensive outreach to rural areas was subsidized by telephone profits in other market sectors. We need to guarantee access to information and computer skills in an age when this is required for most people to earn a living.

**Practical Examples and Recommendations**

I want to mention just a few practical examples of what is being done to facilitate dialogue and interactivity. When I interviewed telecommunication ministers of all the European Union countries, I found that – even in the competitive telecommunications sector – these nations were in dialogue and were collaborating. For example, they pool resources for costly telecommunications “pre-competitive” research and development. As this R & D began to lead to specific products, various nations and corporations can put on competitive gloves and battle it out in the marketplace. And there is much dialogue on technical standards.

In the U.S., the late Cardinal Bernardin envisioned a project that could seek “common ground” among Catholics and this project moved forward. It developed communication tools (study guides, videos) that can facilitate dialogue at the parish level. Much of this work has continued at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

In the U.S. Commerce Department I have helped to evaluate proposals in a program called the Telecommunications Information Infrastructure Assistance Program (TIAP) where over $100 million has been invested in projects in five areas: community networking, education, culture and lifelong learning; health; public safety; and public services. These government grants facilitate interactive network development and are matched by local grants.

The good news is that decades of theoretical work has already been done on the dialogic. This is based on research in negotiation theory which grew out of earlier work in game theory. We know that to promote dialogue does not necessarily mean that groups must reach consensus. We should, as media leaders and people of faith, “spread the good news” of dialogic success stories. We need to accumulate case studies and help our civic and religious leaders learn the dialogic and interactive way. This is not easy. Most of us have been educated in a linear and top-down intellectual cultural system. For those who hold power, it will not be easy to move from “power over” to the more interactive and dialogic “power with.” The hyperlink world of the Internet seems irrational, chaotic; yet, like chaos theory in the sciences, we will see patterns in the chaos.
We are finding that many dialogic tools like the fax, the cell phone and the E-mail message, all increasing the speed and pace of our lives, shortening the turnaround time expected in our tasks. We need to learn how to use these tools to make us more effective and collaborative, instead of just fast. We can foster respect for wisdom instead of simply promoting the continual accumulation of information. I have found that in a hyper-speed world I need to insure my own quiet space. This may explain the growing attraction of what Trappist monk Thomas Keating called centering prayer which has its own Contemplative Outreach Website, incidentally, regularly visited by many thousands of those who seek meditative silence.

My prejudice is that I believe education is the solution to most problems. We need to organize experiential and informational materials for parents, for parishes, for communities, for political and economic leaders so we can use our dialogic tools and culture to be informed and open to new ideas, to negotiate in “win-win” ways and to use cyberspace with wisdom. Church leaders need to study internal interactive communication flows and see what cyberspace networks can teach us about being more participative church communities (Intranets, as well as the Internet).

All this will help us serve more fruitfully as our faith communities unite for both prayer and justice.
Biblical Storytelling In A Digital Age

By Frances Forde Plude

[This paper was presented at the Conference of Biblical Scholars in India.]

Presented here are reflections in connection with Dr. Thomas Boomershine’s work, in theory and in practice, on biblical storytelling. I am writing, not as a biblical scholar, but as a specialist in theology and in digital culture. Thus, I have, within the paper, included some occasional thoughts on how storytelling today, in a post-literate world, may link to the biblical storytelling tradition explored in Boomershine’s work.

In the digital world content seems to die quickly. However, in the United States there is a weekly TV magazine program – called 60 minutes – that is forty years old; and in August this program was #2 in the U.S. TV ratings. Don Hewitt, its producer, was asked once: what is the secret of its forty-year success in the rapidly changing, and competitive, TV world? He answered: “Four words: tell me a story.” Every week, in three or four segments on everything from Guantanamo to whistleblowers to heads of state to leading basketball stars, these segments are packaged as stories. Hewitt knew the story form is part of humanity’s unconscious. Here, in India, your own many cultures are steeped in stories.

As we gather today, you and I are stories. We are, in fact, a collection of many individual stories; we are united because we have been transformed by stories about our God – by biblical stories. As our colleague Tom Boomershine wrote in his wonderful book Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling: “Our lives are story journeys” (16). There is a basic and important fact to be mentioned here. In today’s global Information Society, the Scriptures can be a unifying principle; these are stories that have been shared globally for centuries.

And I agree with Boomershine that the hermeneutic of digital culture (sharing of stories and webs of relationships) ought to be the hermeneutic of today’s biblical scholarship. Let me explain why my studies have led me back to stories. Here is what I plan to share with you in this paper. As usual with our studies, I have been engaged here in an intellectual dialogue with key thinkers. I will introduce them as I move through my paper.

So first I will explore story as epistemology – as a way of knowing. Secondly, we should consider what happened when stories were technologized – when the Greeks and, later, Gutenberg (with writing, rational systems, and printing), culturally had an impact on oral stories, including biblical storytelling. And, thirdly, we are living now through another major revolution – the transfer from an analog to a digital world; here global cultures (and our stories) are being transmitted around the world by digital bits of data in computer software: by social networks.
linking our stories; by websites and by sociological shifts resulting from these computer network connections.

Many stories have been digitized spawning a global movement called Digital Storytelling (DST). I want to share this phenomenon with you, and we can reflect together on how biblical stories are co-existing with digital narratives.

A few years ago I was helping to organize a session for the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA). This was one of a series of annual presentations for CTSA we planned around the concept of Communication Theology. In this program we were to focus on a dramatic and thoughtful U.S. TV series entitled Nothing Sacred. These stories featured a liberal priest with sincere self-doubts. Our speaker for the CTSA session was the Jesuit Bill Cain, the creator/writer of Nothing Sacred. He spoke about the controversy surrounding the stories because he created real characters with real problems. The series won numerous awards.

Cain’s associate, another Jesuit, Kevin Bradt, worked with us also. At that time, Bradt gave me a copy of his book entitled Story as a Way of Knowing. This work helped me to see the epistemological aspect of story. Bradt wrote: “As a medium of communication, story will structure thought. In other words, story is not just an art form but an epistemology, a technique, or way of knowing the world, the self, and the other. Story as a way of knowing shapes our ways of interacting and relating” (3). Brandt notes that scholars like Jacques Ellul, Eric Havelock, Marshall McLuhan and others “have done much to reclaim the oral-aural (speaking-listening) dynamics of story as humankind’s primary and oldest mode of communicating, thinking, knowing, and relating” (6).

We need to spend a little time here with oral storytelling origins and the transition to writing and print. Often consulted in this regard is Walter Ong, another Jesuit. (You may begin to suspect that I am partial to Jesuits and, with five years at Boston College, I was trained by them.)

Bradt notes that “Storying as a way of knowing, as a structuring of human consciousness and perception, was changed forever with the development of writing. Ong says the various forms of writing, such as script, print, computer, are ‘all the same because … [they] are all ways of technologizing the word’” (20). Once I was lucky enough to spend a day with Ong in a small discussion group at St. Louis University. He came to our meeting because he was deeply interested in the conceptual alliance we were constructing between theology and communication.

In Ong’s work entitled “Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought”, Ong proposes some concepts I will simply list here. These ideas are profound and concepts that many people have not thought much about previously:
• Once words have been translated from dynamic, vibrating, changing sounds to the ‘rigid visual fixity’ of text, the words are ‘reduced to space, frozen and in a sense dead.’

• ‘Writing separates the known from the knower. It promotes objectivity. By being removed from the context of the interactive personal relationship created by speaking and listening, the words of a text are radically depersonalized and altered…’

• Texts change ‘knowing’, an interactive dialogic activity, into ‘knowledge’, an impersonal denatured object that one possesses.

• There is a loss of immediacy in writing. ‘Writing distances the source of communication (the writer) from the recipient (the reader), both in time and space.’

• Writing encourages administrative, bureaucratic, and managerial styles of relationship based on supervision and power.

• In time, the word on paper becomes even more important and of greater concern than the world of human experience.

• Oral speech and thought transfers experience and the environment, into narrative, whereas philosophy, which comes along after writing, is radically anti-narrative. (44)

• Storytelling became disenfranchised after Gutenberg, but it remains subversive because, as Bradt says, storytelling challenges as illusory the objectivity, control, and permanence that print technology brought to modern consciousness (37).

Each of these concepts could inspire many moments of reflection and study. We have now considered story as epistemology, a way of knowing, and we have some understanding of how the alphabet, writing and printing technologized oral storytelling. Now we should think about the implications of the reality that you and I now live within, another new technological revolution – a global digital technologized world.

A brief note about digital technology. In the recent past, messages (like telephone calls) were distributed utilizing analog (electromagnetic wave form) transmissions. This is now replaced by digital (computer bit) transmission. Once this change occurred it became possible to speed up the transmissions through time-sharing, compression, and other techniques. Optical fiber and Internet links meant that more and more information (including music and video) could travel over these ‘information highways’, making global distances irrelevant.
As Wikipedia explains: In multimedia applications, the digital revolution altered the storage of information previously located on fixed material objects (words in books, sound on phonograph records or audio cassettes, and images on film). Now all media could be stored as information in a binary digital format. And all this transformed digital information could now be moved easily between media and could be distributed and accessed remotely.

Thus, we have *The Rise of the Network Society*. This is the title of Volume I of a trilogy by the Spanish scholar Manuel Castells. His trilogy is entitled *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. As a professor at the University of California at Berkeley for many years, Castells was right up the road from America’s Silicon Valley. And he was steeped in that culture. But the wonderful thing about his work is that his vision and his scholarship and statistics are so global, and he sees way beyond the technology. In the second volume of his trilogy, entitled *The Power of Identity*, he examines the impact of the Information Society on the project of the self, and the ability of individuals and groups (activist movements and nations, for example) to be linked together globally and with ease. Volume III, entitled *End of Millennium*, examines the collapse of the Soviet Union, informational capitalism, and the development and crisis in the Asia Pacific, among other topics. The scope of the work of Castells is both breathtaking and very, very solid.

In one of his essays entitled “Informationalism, networks, and the network society: a theoretical blueprint”, Castells introduces these realities:

- Communication networks are the patterns of contact created by message *flows* among communicators through time and space. … networks process these flows

- Networks constitute the fundamental pattern of life, of all kinds of life. History shows the pervasiveness and relevance of networks as the backbone of societies, thousands of years ago, in the most advanced ancient civilizations.

- Thus, there was globalization of a sort in antiquity; societies depended on others for their livelihood, resources, and the power of connectivity to networks beyond the limits of their locality.

- Today digital technologies allow us to *recombine* information based upon interaction and feedback. This is usually referred to as Web 2.0 – the ability of almost any individual to create and re-create content (to become communication *producers*, not just users).

Well, there are thousands of dramatic concepts within the Castells trilogy, but these few ideas give us a foundation for our study of the global movement known as Digital Storytelling (or DST). As we have noted, storytelling as a way of *knowing*, and networking as a fundamental pattern of life – these have existed for centuries. And we have also seen that oral storytelling has
become technologized by writing and by print. What happens to storytelling in a global digital world? *How are bible stories and biblical scholarship altered in this global digital culture?*

One answer, of course, is that humans form computerized, digital social networks. They tell their stories in Email or on Facebook – the most popular uses of the Internet. They use technologies like Skype, the free software that allows a person to speak to another person (or a conference of several people), no matter how distant the participants are from one another. And if the computers have a motion eye camera at the top of their computer screen, the people can see one another as they speak. But people want more than that. So formal social networking sites like YouTube, Facebook, and others have grown dramatically. Now people can have their own site on a social network, they can talk about their lives there, they can share photos, and they can invite ‘friends’ to share information from *their own* social network site. And blogs and podcasts are additional whole sites of personal storytelling; millions of people have their own Web logs and share their ideas and stories daily on the Internet.

It is almost as if people *must* tell their stories – no matter what century they are living in. The mode of transmission changes as the technology of writing, printing, and digitizing emerges. But people want to share their stories. There are also some *power dynamics* at work here. The digital technology and culture represent (to a degree) a democratization of power as media stories are shared widely and as mobile technology makes it easier and less expensive.

Now, as you might have guessed, the concept and the actual format of DST, Digital Storytelling, emerged in the vicinity of the movie industry in California. But, as we shall see, it has become a global community of storytellers.

Joe Lambert, in California, is the author of *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. Lambert notes “I believe interest in digital storytelling grew because of the disintegration of our historic social network.” (xix). He adds: “We approach the (digital) storytelling part of our work as an extension of the kind of everyday storytelling that occurs around the dinner table, the bar, or the campfire” (17).

At his Center for Digital Storytelling, Lambert runs workshops on how to bring a group of people together (called “a story circle”). Over a weekend, for example, with the help of facilitators, these individuals can learn to write a script for a short digital movie. They gather photos, and create the story in a digital format, with digital cameras and computer editing software. Usually these digital stories are three to five minutes long. Often the stories are about the person’s life, or a loved one, or perhaps individuals want to share ideas or causes important to them. The Workshop format helps individuals learn how to structure their stories effectively.
Almost as important, however: in the story circle, the group forms the bond that will enable them to confidently share stories and offer affirmation and constructive feedback to each other. As the workshop concludes, participants share their stories by viewing them together. Usually there are many tears shed during this sharing. And I would urge each of you to think about how you would structure your own digital story if you had a chance to share it.

I think you can see that, with a little training, people tell their own digital story better than a professional writer would. And, clearly, this California workshop model is somewhat designed to provide therapy and to build community.

Here is a sense of the digital storytelling reach around the world:

- There are DST programs in educational institutions in South Africa, in Japan, South Korea, Australia, Germany, Spain, Canada, throughout the United States, in the United Kingdom, and many other places.

- There are some community centers and organizations in India where digital storytelling occurs. One program is called, appropriately, “Finding a Voice.”

I want to focus briefly on work at the University of Oslo, in Norway. This program is directed by Professor Knut Lundby, a colleague of mine, who has long been interested in the intersection of media, religion, and culture. He heads the Mediatized Stories Project in Oslo. Professor Lundby has edited two books exploring the impact of what he calls “mediatization” – a particular transformative logic or mechanism that does something distinctive (to “mediatize”) some processes or objects. Mediatization implies a process through which core elements of a social or cultural activity assume media form. (*Digital Storytelling Mediatized Stories* (107)).

Lundby notes that the same year the first digital storytelling workshop was held in California, a path-breaking book by the Latin American scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero was made available in English. Lundby adds: “From his Latin American experience, Martín-Barbero knew how ‘the media’ could be used by power elites as a means of oppression. … he moved the focus from the ‘media’ to the processes of ‘mediations’ (how audiences mediate their own media experiences) … This is relevant to digital storytelling as a practice and a movement.

Martín-Barbero’s approach opens up connections with the history of people’s attempts at alternative ‘mediation’ that challenge the authority of existing media institutions” (182). One part of Professor Lundby’s research involves young people in a church who are creating digital stories. In fact, you can imagine how many young people around the world would be attracted to digital voices. This is their culture!
I hope these ideas about digital storytelling will encourage you to think about your own story, about the fact that we all have stories to tell, and we are all enriched by listening to one another’s stories. As the American “Story Corps” program says: “Listening is an act of love.” Story Corps involves a bus traveling around the U.S. recording audio stories. People can show up and record a conversational story about some aspect of their lives and these are all filed in the U.S. Library of Congress – as an archive of American citizens’ stories. And every Friday on our National Public Radio network one of the stories is shared with everyone tuned in to the radio network. Sometimes a father and a son come together, and the father might share a story from his life that his son has never heard before.

It does not take much imagination to see that this storytelling is connected to biblical storytelling. Jesus told many stories. His disciples repeated His stories and added stories about the life and works of Jesus. We are, at this conference, focusing on these stories and their meaning in our lives today.

Tom Boomershine, as a renowned biblical scholar, has long recognized the power of storytelling as an experiential part of the Gospels. Tom and his wife Amelia, both Methodist ministers, have conducted biblical storytelling workshops throughout the world. Tom notes in his previously-mentioned book *Story Journey*: “In telling and listening to the stories of Jesus, early Christians made connections with their own lives that made clear to them how God was present. And the uniquely revelatory character of these stories has been confirmed in the experience of millions of people over the ages” (19).

He also notes: “Just as each woman and man has a distinctive storytelling style, so also each of us has a unique network of relationships. The stories of the good news are most meaningful when they are told by one person to another in the context of a personal relationship of care” (194). I would add that today’s digital culture empowers these relationship networks.

However, Boomershine is also a student of the impact of digital culture on institutional religion and the stories we share. I have studied his interesting essay entitled “The Religions of the Book and Religious Warfare in Digital Culture.” Here is an interesting thought from that text: “… the reinterpretation of the sacred traditions and stories of the religions in the new communication technology is a crucial dimension of peaceful reformation. To find God speaking in the new technology calms peoples’ fears and makes a peaceful adaptation to the new culture possible. The reinterpretation of the central traditions of these religions in the languages and systems of digital media is crucial for a peaceful future. We need to demonstrate that our experience of God is not dependent on preserving an earlier culture and its media system” (6).

Let me conclude with some personal reflections as I researched the power of story in a global digital culture.
First, I find it useful to think of many of these ideas within the rubric of “distribution systems.” The early Christian, apostolic period distributed stories in oral narratives. Writing and printing arrived as new types of distribution systems. Monasteries represented a unique distribution system with monks copying and preserving documents that were informational, liturgical, and scriptural. Later universities and schools added a new distribution system, helping spread literacy and learning. In America, and other places, the Catholic Church built an unparalleled distribution system: Catholic parishes and schools, Catholic hospitals, and Catholic social service agencies.

As electronic and digital distribution systems developed, some churches felt uncomfortable with these new systems because they were decentralized and harder to control. Unlike their previous domination of distribution systems, faith communities have, in many cases, underutilized these new digital forms.

Boomershine was one of the earliest scholars to urge the sacralization of new media. When the technology of printing emerged, allowing the printing of the Bible in German, the medium of printing was sacralized. He now urges the sacralization of the Bible in the new technology and culture of the digital media. He has urged biblical scholarship to make the Bible present in the digital communication system and culture. If this is not done it will represent an underlying problem for churches globally. What has happened, Boomershine notes, is that today’s digital culture is almost completely managed by for-profit groups, stressing sex, and violence because this increases profits. Communities of faith need to share our biblical stories in a new form, a digital format.

Many writers I studied have spoken of the way digital storytelling empowers people and builds community. Is it possible that by sharing our stories and biblical stories, easily, digitally, across cultural divides, we can, in a grassroots way, offset the tendencies of religious and national groups to promote war? Communicating on mobile phones has turned out to be the computer of choice among the poor, for example. What opportunities exist here for networking in meaningful new ways with poor people around the world? Digital storytelling and other such participatory tools can give a voice to the poor. This requires thoughtful insights and action on the part of all religions. An interesting digital-age question is: What would Jesus do?

In addition, newly developing nations and cultural groups can strengthen their sense of identity and national pride by systematically archiving their individual stories. Social network sites have many millions of visitors each month (McKinsey Quarterly, 2/09). This unlocks participation globally and demands a different mindset. The range of technological distribution systems includes blogs, podcasts, information tagging, wikis – the list is almost endless. Underused human potential can be tapped by participatory tools.
Think of digital storytelling as *scrapbooks*. (In the 21st century scrapbooking is a multibillion-dollar industry.) This desire to record and preserve can be traced back to the “commonplace book” of the Renaissance. Women through recent centuries have found their voice in the pages of scrapbooks they created. These collages of memories allow for self-expression and meaning by recording lives.

Finally, in developing their own story and listening to others, people can make the links between their own stories and the larger social struggle. Individual stories add up to the larger story. By starting with your own story, and analyzing your own problems, a larger, even global, social consciousness is possible.

By hearing about the stories of Jesus today, through these new digital distribution systems, perhaps people around the globe can come to believe that the non-violence Jesus preached can truly save the world.
Communication Theology: Some Basics

By Bernard R. Bonnot

[Father Bonnot helped, for many years, to organize Communication Theology Seminars at annual meetings of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA).]

Today no single system of thought dominates theology as Thomism once did. Theologians now use many approaches, including Thomism, within the general context set by the Second Vatican Council. This complexity interfaces with the emerging new communication technologies and their constantly novel applications, to provide abundant grist for the theological mill. To avoid spinning our reflective wheels while making no real theological advance, we must be selective. Karl Rahner, among others, advises holding our reflections close to the mysteries of faith central to the Catholic hierarchy of truths. This reflection considers communication within the mysteries of Trinity, Creation, Revelation and Incarnation.

Communicators need to reflect on their communication experiences precisely as religious, as experiences of God. For Christians, that experience is in Christ and the Spirit. Theologians can encourage communicators to multiply, record, and collect their reflections. Then the theologians can deepen those reflections and relate them to the corpus of traditional and contemporary theology. Feeding those deeper reflections back to communicators and the church at large will help shape the self-understanding (theoria) of communicators and their professional practice (praxis) in the context of both church and world. The entire exercise will help communications mature as a ministry.

Trinity

The most fundamental and essential teaching in the hierarchy of truths of faith is the mystery of the Trinity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #234). God, as revealed by Jesus, is three persons constituting one Godhead. Trinity sets Christian faith apart from other religions as dramatically as does the mystery of Incarnation. Contemporary theologians understand the Trinity's inner life as self-communicating love, a dynamic and intimate sharing among Three. The technical term for the result is communio, while the term for the process is circumincessio. This approach provides promising grounds for considering communication as a core ministry, one at the heart of what the Church is all about. In addition, Trinity stands as source, model, and goal of all godly and Christian communication.

The Church has long affirmed the centrality of communication in Christian faith and life, but only implicitly. Our standard explicit terms for what we are about -- apostolate, missions, making disciples, teaching, preaching, sanctifying, magisterium, and today evangelization -- veil
their inner substance, communication. This has caused 'communication' to be perceived as little more than a technique and tool, something that may be used to get something important done but not something important -- *in itself*.

This perception marginalizes the ministry of communication in church thought, esteem, and budgeting. Yet in the Trinity, communication is both process and product. *Communio* is what God is all about, the reality, the substance. Reflection on Trinity manifests how central communication is to our life as church, as indicated in the 1971 Vatican document, *Communio et progressio* (#8). This document affirms that “in the Christian faith, the unity and brotherhood of man are the chief aims of all communication and these find their source and model in the central mystery of the eternal communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who live a single divine life.”

**Creation and Revelation**

Once we approach God as self-communicating trinitarian love, we see the mysteries of Creation and Revelation as part of that self-communicating dynamic. The reality in all these mysteries of faith is the same, only the dimension is different. "Trinity" references God communicating internally; Creation and Revelation refer to God communicating externally. Creation references God communicating materially, cosmically; Revelation refers to God communicating verbally, intellectually, or epistemologically. Faith reflecting on these experiences can bring into focus not only the results -- creation as object, revelation as truth -- but also the process generating those realities: God self-communicating. Modern technological developments are catalyzing that theological shift.

Humans marvel at creation and its potentialities. We constantly probe, explore, discover, and map it, transforming our wonder into knowledge. We look for new frontiers and find ways to settle into what we find. Our fascination with creation is a happy one. What intrigues us is nothing less than God self-communicating with splendiferous love. At times we get so bedazzled by the splendor that we lose sight of God.

Today, a major frontier of our fascination is, precisely, communication. We wonder at the significance of a wave of a hand, the meaning of waving flags, the power of brain waves, the reach of electronic waves. Some of today’s most significant and dramatic technological breakthroughs are our progress in the field and the incredible experiences modern communication afford. A challenge for religious communicators and theologians is to see them as religious and theological breakthroughs as well.

This is difficult. We incline to worry the new modes of communication will alienate us from God. Theological reflection can help us bring Creation, Revelation, and the technology of
modern communication together, expanding our appreciation of the many ways the Divine Communicator reveals love to us through the ceaseless wonders of creation, including its many different ‘waves.’

With this perspective, we can appreciate the Church's use of communication and our individual enjoyment of the media with the insights they occasion. We begin to cherish them as experiences of God communicating and revealing. The media are truly analogical. They participate by means of the nature they manifest. We should, therefore, appreciate the electronic media as far more than 'tools' enhancing some other truly worthwhile ministry. We should venerate them in ways analogical to the way we venerate vestments and vessels, icons and sanctuaries, music and stained-glass windows. They are sacred and holy. The Church’s official publication for the liturgical rituals, the 1989 *Book of Blessings*, evidences this attitude by including a formal "Order for the Blessing of Centers of Social Communications." Its liturgical texts clearly connect communication with creation and revelation: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*.

**Incarnation**

The Word became flesh, human, one of us living among us. In Jesus, the self-communicating love of the triune God became fully revealed, tabernacled itself in a special dimension of creation -- the human. Jesus, the head of Creation, the fullness of Revelation, is the full reality of God self-communicating humanly to humans. In Jesus, the divine Word, conceived and first spoken in the womb of Trinity, (God's eternal brain wave, if you will), reverberated in the womb of the Virgin and vibrated forth into the womb of humankind, taking flesh, resounding among us. In Jesus, the Word expressed itself humanly, in flesh, blood, and bone, seen and sensed, loved and embraced; in movements and touches, in sights and sounds, in emotions felt and shared, like the warming waves of the sun.

Human communication is never concept and idea alone. It is the "the giving of self in love" (*Communio et progressio*, #11), and the giving is of, and through, body. So came God in Jesus. Labeling the mystery of Jesus as "incarnation" abstracts his reality into a truth, a dogma. It alienates us from experiencing Jesus as communication. For the reality of Incarnation is our Triune Lover self-communicating to humans as a person, humanly available, and as a community of persons, the Mystical Jesus, in whom, and through whom, God lives and acts. In Jesus, God shares with us face-to-face in self-sacrificing love and keeps doing so until the communication is complete, the giving is done, *communio* is consummated.

The reflections of communication theology help us see both communication and Incarnation as *media-tions*. Such theological reflection will help our Church move beyond the dominance of words -- spoken or printed -- in our sharing of faith, enabling us to embrace also such media as image and personality, drama and dialogue, sitcom and story, music and dance. Reflection on the
Incarnation confirms the rumor, the hunch, the insight, that these are equally valid means of communicating God's love, though less familiar. Such reflection will also validate electronically mediated forms of God’s communication. Belief in Incarnation enables us to affirm these newer modes of ministry as effective, just as the traditional and mainly verbal modes of preaching, teaching, writing and reading. Thus, one theologian/campus minister testified that the most effective medium for sharing the Gospel with today's young adults is, in a word, drama.

Theological reflection on Incarnation helps today’s communicators grow into a deeper appreciation of their electronic waving of images and sounds to others. It manifests their craft as a new iconography, a holy projecting of convictions, emotions, beliefs, and experiences which others can use to open their lives to the Divine. Medieval theologians saw in Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and Perfect Icon, a *communicatio idiomatum*, an intimate exchange (*communio*) of the human and the divine. And we moderns can perceive our electronic communication as a new, and perhaps improved, way the human and divine find and enter into one another (*circumincessio*), generating *communio* with one another and God in, and through, Jesus.

Reflection on the Incarnation will incline our thoughts about communication to emphasize the Word. So, it is important to remember Incarnation results from the Trinitarian missioning of both Word and Spirit. Mary conceives not merely when she hears the angel's word but more precisely when she says "yes" and is "overshadowed." Perhaps the meaning will strike us more profoundly if we say that she was 'irradiated,' or 'electrified' by the Spirit. Communication theology takes this dynamic role of the Spirit into account. Indeed, as Trager noted, as we research which kind of waves reach furthest into human consciousness, we will understand more and more fully that the Spirit is the source of our most profound communications experiences.

Communication activities extend the divine into the human in many ways, including those electronic, and through this we experience Word, Spirit and, ultimately, Father. Through communication, Trinity comes alive and we humans come to know the living God.
Communication Theology Status Report, June 2000

Prepared by Frances Forde Plude

Communication Theology at the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA)

There were five sessions at the CTSA San Jose convention of import for CT: Frances Forde Plude spoke on the topic to the Feminist Theologians’ group; links were forged with the Practical Theology group; Kathryn Tanner and Mary Hess looked at cultural studies in the CT Seminar; and two special sessions focused on computers due to the Silicon Valley locale. Several small-group meetings brought new ideas (and new people) into the project so there is a commitment from several to ongoing input. Younger theologians are among this group (including Tom Beaudoin, the author of Virtual Faith).

Next year the Communication Theology seminar within CTSA will focus upon music as a communication modality within today’s culture. We brainstormed this with younger theologians. We proposed to Peter Phan, the Vietnamese Vice President of CTSA, that his convention planning incorporate music throughout the program and he hopes, with our help, to do this. This was somewhat inspired by the UK’s Cambridge University “Theology Through the Arts” program explained last summer by Jeremy Begbie at a Media, Religion and Culture conference in Scotland.

Publication Plans

Jeremy Langford, Editor-in-Chief at Sheed and Ward Publishers, attended several CT discussions and is strongly committed to publishing CT materials.

1. He has asked Paul Soukup and Fran Plude to be official co-editors of the Sheed and Ward Communication, Theology, and Culture series.
2. He has agreed to energetically seek and publish new titles in the series.
3. He agrees that these materials (and the existing 8 volumes in the series) need to have Web-based materials, etc., to enable users to unfold the books’ contents for teaching and pastoral ministry use.
4. He hopes (through Paul Soukup’s American Bible Society Media Project involvement) to widen the distribution within Christian Booksellers.
Funding Efforts

Several discussions focused on components of a funding proposal which will be written this summer – to seek funds to support systematic discussions, for other project components and to allow theologians some subsidized time for writing.

Resource Materials

Communication Theology: Resource Sheet #1

History and Analytical Frameworks

1. History to date
   a. Seminars on Communication & Theology, Gregorian University, Rome
   b. Eight Sheed & Ward books in series: Communication, Culture & Theology
   c. CTSA annual seminars for almost a decade
   d. Media, Religion and Culture seminars in U.S., Scotland, and Sweden
   e. Communication Theology courses taught at several institutions
   f. Formation programs, Rome, Manila, Dayton for ministerial leaders
   g. 30 theology doctoral students globally are exploring communication

2. Genres of Communication Studies
   a. Structural/Functional theories: language, social systems
   b. Cognitive/Behavioral theories: psychology, the individual
   c. Interpretive theories: phenomenology, hermeneutics
   d. Critical theories: society, social practice (Marxism, feminism)
   e. Interactional theories: social life as a process of interactions

3. Five possible Interfaces Between Theology & Communication

Developed by Daniel Felton

1. Theology and Communication
   (borrowing communication uses, constructs: linguistics, culture, texts)

2. Communicative Theology
   (communication-centered, communication-oriented theology)

3. Systematic Theology of Communication
   (communication as a specific discipline within systematic theology)
4. Pastoral Theology of Communication  
   (cultural studies, ministries, catechesis, preaching, formation)

5. Christian Moral Vision of Communication  
   (practice and policy making; participatory communication)

Communication Theology: Resource Sheet #2

1. Sample CTSA Communication Theology Seminars at CTSA  
   a. Communication Theology Dialogue: Soukup, Plude, Philibert  
   b. Trinity as Self-Communication: John R. Sachs, S.J.  
   c. Narrative Within Communication Theology: Terrence W. Tilley  
   d. Preaching as Communication Theology: Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P.  
   e. Nothing Sacred as Communication Theology: Bill Cain, Kevin Bradt  
   f. Reception Within Communication Theology: Richard Gaillardetz  
   g. Cultural Contest for Communication Theology: Kathryn Tanner

2. Sheed & Ward/Communication, Culture & Theology books (available now at Rowman & Littlefield)  
   a. Fidelity & Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media  
   b. From One Medium to Another: The Bible and Multimedia  
   c. New Image of Religious Film  
   d. Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ Figures in Film  
   e. Media, Culture and Catholicism  
   f. Communication and Lonergan  
   g. Mass Media and the Moral Imagination  
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Signis Report On Theology And Communication

[This document, prepared by Gaye W. Ortiz in November 2003, was presented to the Signis Assembly of Delegates meeting in Cape Town, South Africa. Signis is the official title of the World Catholic Association of Communication.]

Origins

The original purpose of this program, as devised by a small committee in 2002 at the Signis board meeting in Mechelen, was to encourage an element of theological reflection comprised in the activities and ethos of Signis and to provide a service of an international dimension to those working in the area of theology and communication.

The former was to be initially addressed by inviting a theologian to each board meeting to identify areas of reflection for board members; the latter, by initiating a discussion ‘Question of the Month’ on the Signis website and by working with existing institutions in developing a reflection on theology and communication.

Update

The search for a South African theologian to attend our assembly began through recommendations of contacts from Bernardo Suate and Sr Angela Ann Zukowski. I had a brief correspondence with Fr Gabriel from a local seminary who promised to put me in touch with someone from the South African Theological Society, but this contact never materialized. Using a source recommended by Frances Forde Plude, I contacted another person from the Theological Society weeks before the assembly. At the time of the submission of this report no answer had been received.

Following several unsuccessful attempts to establish a forum and locate a moderator for the discussion exercise, it was clear that this approach was not workable as a first step of the program. Instead, a rethinking of the proposed activities has led to a reassessment of the strategy needed to attain the goals of this program. I have had input from Guy Marchessault, Sr Rose Pacatte, Sr Angela Ann and Frances Forde Plude in composing this plan of action.

Plan of Action 2004-05

1. Working with existing institutions – There are many regional academic programs in theology and communications. These range from one-time seminars, like the National Seminar in Bangalore in 2002 to undergraduate and graduate programs, such as Communicative Theology offered by Leopold-Franz University in Innsbruck and
Theology and Media offered by University of St Paul, Ottawa. Two key contacts are the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology and the International Federation of Catholic Universities.

**PROPOSAL:** a) to establish links within the regions that will promote Signis to these universities with theology and communication programs, initially by email contact that has a URL link to the Signis website; b) to represent Signis at the next conferences of these two associations; c) to hold a consultative meeting coinciding with the International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture in Louisville, at which Guy Marchessault, Fran Plude and I will discuss with other attendees in the theology and communication field the possibilities for Signis involvement, such as in the provision of online courses in theology and communication.

2. A *communication theology presence on the Signis website* – I have several recommendations that are simple and straightforward to implement, which only need a dedicated member of the Brussels secretariat. Rather than producing information that is already duplicated elsewhere (such as the mooted discussion question of the month, and which might not be used to its full extent) Signis will be a helpful international resource.

**PROPOSAL:** The task will be to post on to our website materials and links that are of interest to those working in the theology and communication field, and to furnish them in the three Signis languages.

3. *Encouragement of scholarship in theology and communication* – Signis can be instrumental in helping students in this field further their studies by offering international scholarships.

**PROPOSAL:** to set up a committee to devise guidelines and procedures for offering the first Signis Theology and Communication scholarships in Academic Year 2005.
Reflections On The Papal Encyclical Process

[These thoughts, written in October 1993, consider how process affects credibility.]

I have been reading about the Pope's new encyclical. I look forward to deeper reflection on it in America, Commonweal, The Tablet, and other journals, and seeing the text; but some thoughts about communication have already surfaced in my mind.

1. As communication scholarship now teaches, the meaning-making we all do (including the Pope), is very much the product of our culture. He, too, is the product of his culture: his studies, his personality, his teachers, his previous church experience, etc. For each of us, including the Pope, God builds on our own unique nature and cultural history, as we all contribute to building the Kingdom. However, any statement by any Pope, reflects an interpretation of our culture that is, itself, culturally bound by our own personal attempt to make meaning out of today's world. Just as Thomas Jefferson's attitude toward slavery was a culturally bound attitude, while his struggle with defining human rights, in the face of the institution of slavery, was his unique attempt to deal with truth and humanity's ideals.

2. To communicate credibly one must listen. This is true even of our prayer life: in addition to speaking to God verbally, we must be quiet and let God be with us in the silence from which we gain so many insights. And, within the human family itself, we have -- thank God -- developed to a point in history where we can see the need for discourse in our deliberations. In the West, this is based on our history of Plato and Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas's use of the dialogic in building scholastic philosophy, the Enlightenment, and the growth of the modern scientific method. The East and woman's intuitive way of learning are teaching us that collaborative insights represent another way of communicating. But all of this requires sincere attention to feedback. Rather than think about the content of the encyclical, I reflect here upon the communication process. If discourse is prohibited, a refusal to listen can be devastating in the search for truth. If discussion had been cut off in other arenas, we might still hold slaves and believe the earth is the center of the universe.

3. In addition to aborting the search for authentic truth, communication that will not allow discourse to continue suffers in credibility. It is "top-down" in an age that has committed itself, in many places throughout the world, to listening to the grass roots. To be credible in such a world, the church should allow dialogue. Especially with theologians, who are the research and development arm of the church.

Dialogue is messy. It is cumbersome. It requires strong voices urging discipline and saying the difficult things we all should hear. But the difficult messages (like "Come, Follow Me") must co-
exist with all the other messages, and, as Vatican II said, must interact with, and be enriched by, voices of the world.

4. How does one deal, then, with a world which is "wired" and in which many discordant (even evil) messages conflict? With a unique and challenging message, not with an authoritarian one. With credibility, not with crushing the opposition.
IV. Dialogue with Theologians
# The Unavoidable Dialogue: 5 Interfaces Between Theology & Communication

*Gregorian Dissertation by Daniel J. Felton – Summary prepared by Frances Forde Plude.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interface &amp; Sources</th>
<th>Determinants/Horizon</th>
<th>Concepts &amp; Categories</th>
<th>Framework for Future Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Theology and Communication</strong></td>
<td>Theology borrows theories, method models from communication science to reflect upon religion</td>
<td>The major topics are: religious self-understanding, attitudes toward communication, Christian uses of communication, Christian ethics/advocacy</td>
<td>What is the theology underlying communication?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organizing principles and perspectives: linguistics, aesthetics, cultural, dialogic theories, models</td>
<td>How is theology illuminated or systematized internally by the communication constructs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Soukup</td>
<td>Theologians must know these constructs to ensure the integrity of what is borrowed: meta-theories of communication systems and methods: discourse, contexts, and texts</td>
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<td>Communication and Theology</td>
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<td><strong>2. Communicative Theology</strong></td>
<td>Standing in the field of communication looking at the horizon of theology</td>
<td>Takes culture seriously: its influence on the ways we think, speak, write</td>
<td>What is the nature of communication being explored by theology (communication theory, methods)?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Should develop knowledge about the communicative human being: encoding, decoding messages; how people process media content</td>
<td>How will theology be more communicative, understood?</td>
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<td>Is there a model of communication self-consciously contained process (how it develops communicative theology)?</td>
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<td>A. Van der Meiden, “Appeal for a More Communicative Theology”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theology is self-consciously informed by communication; its content, as in theology, and product (disseminating theology)</td>
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<td>Will the theological content be changed?</td>
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<th>3. Systematic Theology of Communication</th>
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<td>One stands within the theory and practice of theology looking at the horizon of communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church documents have urged an explicit theology of communication</td>
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<td>What is the nature of communication to be systematized?</td>
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<th>John Orme Mills as cited in Soukup</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seeks to build a theoretical systematic, theological study of the phenomenon of communication, as a specific discipline, or within the sphere of systematic theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>This usually draws upon communication found in a theology of revelation, trinity, incarnation, doctrinal development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the practical issues that can be addressed this way?</td>
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<th>Gaston Roberge cites on iconsphere in Semiological Reflection on a Theology of Communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>These theological categories tend to be existential and presume a “conversionist” understanding of Christ and culture.</td>
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<td>Webber suggests a biblical framework (creation, incarnation, man and sin, redemption)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Robert Webber and Emil Santos</th>
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<td>Emphasizes practice (ministries, catechesis, preaching, counseling, etc.)</td>
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<td>What is the cultural context for this communication concern?</td>
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<th>4. Pastoral Theology of Communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>One stands in the field of pastoral theology looking at the horizon of communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examines emerging patterns of communication in local Christian communities and evolving forms of popular communication as in Latin America</td>
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<td>How can solid theological grounds be established for the communication concerns faced within ministries?</td>
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<th>Communio et Progressio (1971); Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Communication (1986)</th>
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Latin American Bishops’ (DECOS-CELAM) of Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979) Need for a theology that has appropriated communication theory and cultural studies (i.e. a habit of theologizing about communication on pastoral situations).

Key area is ministry of formation (going beyond training in media use)

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<tr>
<th>5. Christian Moral Vision of Communication</th>
<th>One stands in the field of moral theology looking at the horizon of communication</th>
<th>Addresses moral dimension of communication practice and policy making within the church and ethical issues human communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clifford Christians, Media Ethics; Robert Rutherford Smith; Michael Traber, Communication For All</td>
<td>The communication is primarily the horizon (reality) of communication practice and policy-making</td>
<td>Issues include: news; media evangelization; media culture and the family; freedom of expression in the church; advertising; privacy; elite ownership of media</td>
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<td>Evangelli Nuntiandi (1975)</td>
<td>Posits communication is a human right</td>
<td>What are the implications for moral theology of raising ethical issues on communication practice and policy making?</td>
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<td>Communio et Progressio (1971)</td>
<td>Need to address the social justice of participatory and democratic communication within churches and the global society</td>
<td>How would these findings change pastoral practice and policies within the Christian church?</td>
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Conversation With Thomas Boomershine

Formerly, United Theological Seminary professor, Dayton, Ohio

Notes by Frances Forde Plude

Development of Theology

- Theology is a form of thought distinct to literary culture.
- Theology is post-New Testament; it did not exist before then.
- Paul prepared the church for it, but did not formulate ideas theologically.
- Theology was a response to Israel’s tradition in philosophical categories.
- Theology, as a discipline, as a body of literature, relates to literate culture.
- A key dimension of theology is its role in evangelization and a literature of apologetics.
- Theology is a philosophical form for the discussion of the primary issues of God and all dimensions of thought in the understanding of church.

Thus, theology has been the primary theoretical framework through which the church has articulated and understood itself.

Current Issues for Churches and Theology

- Theology has been a central theoretical framework of philosophic thought in a literate world (a print culture).
- What do churches do about this in an electronic culture?

Issues/Challenges Related to Communication Theology

- A key issue for Communication Theology is how to interpret the Christian tradition in post-literate culture?
- Does theology’s relationship, as a discipline, to literate culture, mean that theology is problematic as a theoretical framework for Christianity in an electronic culture?

Boomershine Convictions

1. There is a need for a framework for a culturalist theology in relationship to the distinctiveness of an electronic culture.
2. Communication Theology – as a cultural theology – can *explore* the issue of what *are* the basic orientations of thought/meaning in an electronic culture?

3. A worthwhile issue is, what is the relationship between theology and theory?

4. One way of understanding Communication Theology is that it is exploring a theory of Christian communication and culture in an electronic culture.

5. This could be narrative theory; it is conceptualization, but, for an electronic culture, there are significant ways in which it is different from conceptualization and theology to date.

6. In a theology of Christian communication, one could adopt the church’s *critical* language it uses to *critique* methods of communication.

7. One of the ironies of this Communication Theology critique is that it might well conclude that theology – as a defining discipline – would need to recognize the need for a new system of thought – of interests, of the local church, etc. (that theology, as we know it, is inextricably linked to a print culture, and, therefore, limited in dealing with electronic culture).

In his thinking and writing, Boomershine attempts to describe a systemic approach to understanding the presence of the risen Christ in an electronic culture, i.e. what, as a system, this would look like?

There are two justice issues where the church has differed somewhat from the state:

- The sacralization of the present system (whose symbol is the book).
- The transformation of society through literacy (democratization through the power of writing).

At present the bible needs to be re-conceived for an electronic culture (through image, story). Part of the problem is that the role of the theory of Christian communication, in an electronic culture, needs, at least in part, to be located outside of the academy (which is so wedded to print).

**Concerning Oppressed Groups**

Boomershine believes the most under-recognized issue of justice is the oppression created by the way in which electronic communication is being developed – that those who are participants of the communication system are primarily for-profit corporations, with very few alternative communication systems. This injustice is not necessarily a felt need of humanity, but it is a real
need. *Communication Theology’s task could be to search for and articulate a framework of thought and institutional formation to deal with this injustice.*

**Churches as Liberators of Oppression in Literate Culture**

In the light of the above, contrast the church’s significant role in the development of literacy:

- transference from oral to written culture
- development of scripture
- role of early church in teaching slave women to read
- printing facilitates individual bible study
- establishment of schools, monastery libraries, universities
- educational institutions in missions

It is a largely unrecognized dimension of theology and religious institutions – that churches have empowered individuals by teaching them to read.

**Key Questions**

- Can the church now empower/liberate, through a reformulation of its communication and theology?

- Is a “communication theology” movement an appropriate and effective method of accomplishing this task?
Female Theologians: They Are My Sisters

By Frances Forde Plude

[This essay was written in 2011.]

I was awakened by a commotion outside my door. Arriving too late to register at the convention of theology teachers, I heard the woman say: “My name is Monika Hellwig and I need to find some place to sleep.” Monika Hellwig! I opened the door and said, sleepily: “There’s a spare bed in this room; why don’t you use it?”

I kept thinking during the night what a privilege it was to offer hospitality to this remarkable woman. Author of numerous books, former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, single mother of adoptive children, respected theology professor, close-up witness of the Vatican Council; she was all this and more. She was the woman all theologians – male and female – looked up to. The next day Hellwig moved through the convention, now welcomed by numerous other colleagues who were inspired by her output and by herself personally. But I will always cherish the opportunity to be of practical service to her.

And Catherine Mowry Lacugna. I first met Catherine at a small invitational meeting in New York City. We had been invited by America magazine to explore the relationship between theology and communication. As someone who had written on this topic, I had a moment of magical insight as Lacugna spoke on the Trinity; this was to be the topic of a classic she later wrote on this subject. I thought: “The Trinity! The very model of a self-communicating God!”

She and I connected briefly in personal conversation and I prized a later appointment to speak with her further on the campus of Notre Dame University where she taught. When I asked her if feminist theology and female experience marked a substantive change in theological thought she replied: “Theology will never be the same!”

We later watched with horror as this brilliant woman battled leukemia and eventually lost the battle to join her Trinitarian God. May she rest in peace!

My life and work have also been touched by another female theologian. For almost a decade I worked with Father Bob Bonnot in organizing seminars on Communication Theology at the annual conference of the Catholic Theological Society of America. In exploring the interface between Theology and Communication Studies we were a fringe element of the CTSA meetings. The members clearly recognized the importance of communication within the theological enterprise but were unclear how they, as theologians, could implement this integration as they went about their work of thinking and teaching about theology in the contemporary church.
At one point I was told the CTSA President said she thought our work was perhaps the most important thinking being done at their convention. For that support I am grateful to another leading female theologian: Elizabeth Johnson.

These women are my sisters!
Building A Synodal Church: With Communication Theology

By Frances Forde Plude

The open and friendly communication style of Pope Francis has stirred interest globally, especially among communication-study specialists. And when the Pope urged candid discussions at the recent Catholic Synod of Bishops, it was interesting to see how this worked, or did not work, among church leaders.

There were two types of challenges visible in this Synod: negotiating the content divisions and dealing with the processes set up to facilitate healthy dialogue. While the Synod content got most of the global media analysis, as a communication specialist I have chosen here to focus on the process of fomenting dialogue more widely throughout the Church. These process issues are basic to facilitating fruitful dialogue. Much valuable theory and practice already exist to aid the institution in establishing authentic dialogue. But the system resists.

The issue is this: how does a tradition of centralized hierarchy interact with, and communicate effectively in, a decentralized digital world? This devolution of power is a current challenge for many centralized organizations and power structures globally. This has been discussed expertly by Moisés Naím in The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States. However, the Catholic Church and other religions have a dedicated and valued mission – to support human individuals and communities globally with a gospel message. This is a challenge as churches struggle to dialogue effectively past their own internal divisions. This was evident in the recent Synod.

In other words, how does a top-down structure allow dialogue within a global decentralized talk-back culture? The answer is: with great difficulty.

When he spoke to the U.S. bishops on his trip to America, Pope Francis spoke of “a culture of encounter” in which “dialogue is our method.” He showed patience with the squabbling – even name-calling – that occurred among bishops at Synod sessions.

The Pope has said the church needs a “sound decentralization” of authority, adding that the church should not be run like a top-down organization; he said it should be an “inverted pyramid” in which the pope is at the bottom in service to “the people of God.” In his address marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, the Pope made clear the Church should not just hold synods; it should become synodal. The Pope added “the spirit of collegiality has not yet been fully realized” and he urged a “healthy decentralization” away from Rome.
Over thirty years ago, while attending a conference on communication and theology, I had a lovely lunch in a quaint Italian village with three respected theologians, one each from France, Germany and the U.S. Fueled by Italian wine, I asked them “what is the key challenge facing the Catholic Church today?” They answered virtually in unison: “truly listening to the local church.” Within the Church a valuable resource has been developing over these three decades. Here is a trail of some communication and theology events that can facilitate a synodal church:

- Eight international meetings have been held linking communication studies to moral theology, ecclesiology, and other areas of theology.

- For a decade, an annual seminar was held at the convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) so theologians and communication specialists could interact and think together.

- European Catholic funding supported a small international ecumenical commission to meet annually for a decade on various continents to think together with local leaders and scholars of media, religion, and culture.

- For many years the U.S. bishops conference and the Vatican have sponsored seminars at Santa Clara University allowing theology and communication experts to push these ideas further.

- One output has been a document called *A Communication and Theology Resource Kit* with author bibliographies of their key writings on communication and theology.

The challenge, however, is to implement these ideas at the parish and diocesan level, so both content and processes can be enriched by more people, stirring in the gifts of women and other laity. This has already been demonstrated in Europe where workshops held have been attracting hundreds of church members. Their Communicative Theology project is, according to one participant, “experimenting with, and reflecting on, group processes that promote personal and collective discernment and decision-making in the church… they have developed a theologically integrated approach to group communicative practices” (Hinze). Similar workshops could be organized regionally in the U.S.

One insight emerging from all this work is that churches, for centuries, have used various communication channels as instruments to convert. Now, however, communication and computer technologies have merged into global dialogic networks. Individuals, groups, and cultures have become mediated – totally suffused by a global media ecosystem. Churches have found their one-way messages are not being heard or valued either internally or externally, especially by youth. Desperate individuals and leaders have not been listening appreciatively to
each other; gridlock has spread. One specialist says that in most dialogues “we don’t listen; we just reload.” Pope Francis has spoken out against “a hermeneutic of suspicion” or “hostile rigidity.” In *Laudato Si* he used the word “dialogue” 25 times.

Communication theory and practice are keys to the Church’s future success. Digital communication technologies are an essential part of the infrastructure of connection. This is especially important as talk proceeds about decentralization. It is also critical if “the people of God,” that is predominant in local churches, are to be deeply involved in this renewal. The Pope reminded the Synod bishops: “I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly.”
I would like to begin with a story. Recently, I visited a theologian-friend in the Tyrolean Alps. I was feeling rather sad that the visit was ending and, as we were driving along a country road, I noticed this majestic mountain scene off in the distance. To the left there were clouds and rain. Further, to the right, was sunshine. I said: "In my country when you have rain and sunshine together you often see a rainbow". He teased me: "That's just American kitsch, Fran. We don't have rainbows in Germany".

Suddenly, a magnificent rainbow draped itself lovingly over this mountain scene. It was almost as if a voice in heaven had declared: "Look, she wants a rainbow, so give her a rainbow." This experience contained within it a powerful shared symbol for the two of us. As my friend travels around the world, he sends postcards to me from various places; whenever he finds a card with a rainbow on it, that is the postcard he selects. Just recently I received a postcard of a rainbow over the Sea of Galilee, as he visited the Holy Land.

Of course, each of you could tell stories of your own of the power of shared symbols, of words -- how much they communicate. A basic theme of my presentation is, however, that it is the shared experience that is powerful. In fact, my favorite definition of communication is "shared meaning".

However, before we get carried away by rainbows, let me give you a practical road map of our Heck Lecture journey. I will continue to stress the epistemological change in communication when it becomes easily dialogic, when it is widely shared -- as it has become with modern communication technologies like the telephone and the computer network. I believe the real information revolution is this easy technological interactivity. The computer alone allows interactivity with its user. But when the computer is networked, you are truly dialogic. The network is the real revolution. That is why the Internet is so popular.

I see interactivity appearing as a philosophical dialectic in Paul Ricoeur (with his emphasis on metaphor and narrative); and I believe the 1960s applied the dialectical theories of Hegel and Marx to the critique of mass culture, here in the U.S. and in many other places in the world. Even the deconstructionist, even the profound transformation of the man-woman relationship that is underway -- all this reflects mutations in our search for meaning. Of prime interest to us, however, is how interactivity poses a theological challenge. I will link all of this with Paul Tillich's conception of correlation, proposed in his Systematic Theology.
Tillich's wide-ranging genius linked the theologian to contemporary society -- to the arts, to Freudian psychology. It is an easy jump, then, to link theology with a body of work that includes more than 80 years of serious scholarship on the communication process -- not to mention the growth of a mass-mediated world.

I will also share the historical development of the new field of Communication Theology; this new way of thinking seems to demonstrate Tillich's vision of correlation -- between the theologian and a contemporary society that is certainly more electronically wired and interactive than it was in Tillich's time. Following up on Tillich's correlation theory, I will discuss practical applications of integrating communication with theology, especially when the communication is two-way.

Samples include:

- how interactive communication technologies are instruments for a dialogic faith
- how differing views of church will dictate differences in communication, some less dialogic than others
- how women are more and more insistent they be true partners in faith dialogue

Then we can move to pastoral ministry, I will apply the concept of interactivity to language by viewing scripture and Christology as interactive communication between God, the people of God, and God's universe.

We can also view communication interactivity from a relationship perspective in prayer and spirituality. This can touch upon Tillich's "Power of Being" in a technological/interactive age. We can reflect upon how Protestant mystics and contemplatives from the East and the West have moved beyond language in prayer -- into what one mystic called "the cloud of unknowing". We can see, for the prayer of quiet, one must occasionally pull out the electronic plug. Thomas Merton found, for example, that authentic prayerful solitude enabled him to re-connect with humanity in a deeper, more caring, network.

I should address format and approach for a moment. With communication interactivity as my basic theme, I certainly do not want the Heck Lecture experience to be one-way. Each presentation will reserve time at the end for questions and responses from you in the audience. Frankly, we who are collaborating within the developing field of Communication Theology welcome input and new insights as the field matures.
In addition, there will be some small group discussions throughout the day tomorrow and a luncheon later, when I hope we can all interact. It will be especially important to relate some of these ideas to the "real world" of what we will all be doing in the future. So communication interactivity is our theme and here we examine it briefly in philosophy, more extensively in theology.

The Communication Context

To begin with, most people viewing the communication media field today tend not to think about interactivity at all. We worry about what some communication scholars have focused upon: media effects. We see U.S. video (on TV, cable, film) with its heavy emphasis on verbal and physical violence, with even the news media emphasis on violent news, and we worry about the effect of this on those we serve -- even on ourselves. And the key problem is the context in which this violence is portrayed: often the so-called "hero" is the most violent; often violence goes unpunished; often it is shown as a logical solution to a problem. And it only adds to the seriousness of the problem when we realize that on any evening in any major city in the world almost all the top ten movies showing in that city are American films.

In addition to the entertainment and news media content, think about the whole field of communication persuasion (what we used to call rhetoric), which is the basis of all advertising and public relations and the political "spin doctors". Think about the impact of music, within audio and video media.

How can I focus on interactive media when there is all this one-way media? Well, the answer is it is not one-way. Communication research shows that individuals do interact with news stories, with entertainment stories, with advertising stories.

In fact, viewers are busy sorting out a lot of things as they react to media. College students, for example, are notorious soap opera fans. They are clearly "studying" socialization in these dramas, even as they laugh at the content. And much has been said about how the Star Trek "trek" culture seems to key into an altruistic desire, especially among youth, to overcome evil. Incidentally, I have taught classes of female students, both traditional and non-traditional ages, where not a single woman has watched Star Trek at all regularly. Clearly there are gender differences in our story preferences.

Now we can look at the story of Communication Theology and how it grew.
I'd like to begin these reflections with another story -- one that conjures up the perils of learning to survive in a computerized culture. Many years ago, my husband and I made the decision to buy a complete personal computer system and to learn about computers together. Then, as now, the best way to become computer literate is just to begin -- to fiddle with a computer until you get the hang of it. I was then struggling to teach and manage almost 1100 students majoring in Mass Communication at Emerson College in Boston. So, Don did a lot of research, compared prices, and on the 31st of December we entered the store where we thought we could get the best deal. I smiled sweetly and said to a salesman: "For tax purposes, we're going to purchase a complete computer system before the end of the day today; why don't you talk us into spending that money here in your store?"

So, he scurried around and put together a great deal, with lots of free software, etc. and we bought the system and took it all home. Don, who was electronically gifted, connected all the cables and set up the various components on card tables in our living room. And we were all set to enter the computer age leaning on each other. And three weeks later he was dead! He came down with pneumonia, it settled around his heart, and even with ten days of intensive care in the hospital, the doctors could not save his life.

I often say to audiences, if you think you're intimidated by computers, or resentful that we live in a computerized age, imagine how I felt every time I entered my empty home and saw all that computer stuff in my living room. A month or so later I thought of a solution. I called up our local high school, asked for the computer teacher, identified myself, and said: "I need to rent a kid". I asked if he could recommend one of his best students and asked what a fair hourly wage would be for this student to tutor me. In all the years since then I’ have learned most things I know about computers from my students. And they get such a kick out of knowing that they are teaching their professor! We all need to confront the challenge of today’s electronic culture; it was just our luck (or grace) to be called to be Gospel witnesses in an age of interactivity.

To re-cap the main concepts so far:

- interactivity is an epistemological change in the communication process

- interactivity is part of the dialectic of philosophy; it's reflected in Paul Tillich's methodology of correlation, in David Tracy's analogical imagination, and virtually all theologians today think and work in terms of correlation

- correlation links theology, the arts, psychology, and with communication - helping to explain the growth of a new field: Communication Theology
- interactive technologies are instruments for dialogic communities and in practical ways, for example, in the Common Ground project of Bernardin, and in women's desire for more participation in all aspects of the faith dialogue; and

- some of my own thinking on this has resulted in an interactive framework of analysis model which helps to explain the value of strategic alliances -- interactive networks that foster collaborative thinking and action.

Now, we should get practical. Here I would like to explore how communication interactivity is the basis of varied areas of communication theology and pastoral practice, how interactive principles and technologies strengthen language, narrative and public discourse. Among these practical arenas are scripture; Christology; the power of narrative v. the propositional approach; homiletics or preaching; the public square; and networked communities such as your own congregations or the Internet and the World Wide Web.

**Scripture Seen as a Dialogue of Love**

The Vatican II document *Dei Verbum* "interprets (Scripture) as the personal self-revelation of the triune God who invites human beings to enter freely into a dialogue of love" (O'Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology* (p 48). What a difference it makes if we see revelation as primarily interactive! And what a gift this represents -- that an all-powerful God interacts and invites.

Gerald O'Collins says:

> Human beings reveal themselves to others (and to themselves) when they perform properly human acts which are always symbolic: speaking, working, dressing, eating, love making, traveling, worshiping, being sick and dying. The divine self-communication 'corresponds' to our symbolic nature. God, the revealer is God the symbolizer (p 98-99).

Collins adds:

> Symbols emerge mysteriously... One finds such depth and range of meaning in the symbolic language of the fourth gospel: for instance, 'I am the bread of life;' 'I am the light of the world'... From the book of Genesis on, God's communication often takes the form of living symbols, the flood, the sign of the rainbow (which) symbolizes God's undying friendship (p 101).
For a communication theorist, all of this recalls the theory of symbolic Interactionism (Mead) or Barthes' semiotics.

However, there is another way to reflect upon the Bible and our electronic culture. This has been done creatively and persuasively by Tom Boomershine, a member of the United Theological Seminary faculty. I remember how excited I became when I first read Tom's question: "... would we not affirm that electronic technology has its source in the mind of God?" This echoes Rahner's reminder that the world is graced.

And Tillich says:

> The new (aspect of) man's cultural activity is first, the double creation of language and technology. They belong together. In the first book of the Bible, man in paradise is requested by God to give names to the animals (language) and to cultivate the garden (technology). *(Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p 57).

Tom Boomershine confesses: "My hunch is that God has given us the technology of electronic communications in order to further God's steady purpose of loving us and enabling us to love one another". *(Communicating Faith in a Technological Age*, p 86). Also exciting to me was Tom's reminder that our own transition to an electronic culture simply mirrors the "transition from an oral to a written Gospel ... part of a cultural revolution from the patterns of Jewish oral culture to the patterns of Hellenistic literate culture."

He notes:

> The new forms of community in early Christianity took place in the emerging literate culture of Hellenism and are a clear instance of interaction between community and communications technology (p 90).

And Boomershine's challenge rings out:

> How is the living Christ seeking to be embodied in the culture of electronic communications? (The question is) how the Word is to be preached and the sacraments faithfully celebrated by means of electronic communications so that Christ's body can be authentically present in the culture of the electronic age (p 97).

Now, let us move from scripture to Christology. Whenever I reflect upon the text "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God". I am grasped by Communication Theology. If God's self-revealing dialogue runs through the Old Testament, how it comes alive in the
Gospels! Now we have moved from symbol to person -- one who is God's Word Who communicates directly with us, who shares our humanity. Historical interaction!

In the Christology reading I did to prepare these talks I was amazed (even confused) by what is going in in Christology today. I knew, of course, of the search for the historical Jesus, of Ray Brown's wonderful scholarship, of the Jesus Seminar. I found in my files some media cover stories which appeared just within the last year:

- A *Time* magazine cover story on "The Search for Jesus" (April 8, 1996)

- A *Newsweek* Kenneth Woodward cover feature: "Re-thinking the Resurrection: A New Debate About the Risen Christ" (April 1996); and

- *The Atlantic Monthly* cover: "The Search for a No-Frills Jesus" (December 1996)

And this is just the so-called "secular" press. I am no expert on this, but I do recall one prominent European theologian saying to me: "There's a lot of nonsense out there". One article notes that European scholars are aghast at all this reconstruction -- at the American university's tendency to American enthusiasm and entrepreneurship; we seem to them to have an exaggerated scholarly desire to break new ground. (Charlotte Allen, *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1996).

Let us reflect again on Tom Boomershine's plea that churches do serious work on communicating God and the Scriptures authentically in our electronic culture. There is a certain irony, isn't there, that Christ appears regularly on the cover of our secular magazines. That the third most frequently visited Websites in cyberspace are religious Web pages. (The only topics that are more popular are sex and finances).

All this is going on as we are trying, as church leadership, to figure out how to communicate in an electronic culture. We need to be aware that if we do not invest the time, the personnel, and the research in building these bridges between theology and communication theory and practice, there will be a lot of nonsense out there. There are communication theories about groupthink: the concurrence-seeking tendencies of close-knit groups that can cause them to suspend critical thinking and make inferior decisions.

We could be learning from communication and culture studies that show that "Humans are ... suspended in webs of significance that they themselves have spun". Such theories proclaim: "An organization doesn't have a culture; it is a culture -- a unique system of shared meanings.

However, beyond communication theory, I am grounded in Christology by the theologian, Walter Kasper's statement: "The question is: Who is Jesus Christ? Who is Jesus Christ for us..."
today? ... The assertion 'Jesus is the Christ' is the basic statement of Christian belief, and Christology is no more than the conscientious elucidation of that proposition. (Jesus the Christ (p 15).

Karl Rahner speaks of "a searching Christology". However, he says we must "move from a searching Christology, which seeks to discover the absolute bringer of salvation in history, to a Christology which has really found this bringer of salvation in history. It is in this conviction, that the bringer of salvation has been found, that the very heart and substance of Christianity subsists (A New Christology, p 7).

But how can I ignore the volume entitled Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology, by Elizabeth Johnson? (One Trappist monk told me that taking a course with Professor Johnson on Christology saved his Faith!) In her chapter on Christology from a feminist perspective, Johnson notes:

> Almost all theology in the Christian tradition, including liberation theology done from the perspective of the poor and oppressed, has been done by male theologians. In our day we are witnessing the phenomenon that, all over the world, the 'other half' of humanity, women, are waking up to their own dignity and finding their own voice.

She continues: “One result has been that within the community of disciples, faith is now being reflected upon explicitly from the perspective and experience of women... a theology based upon the conviction that women share equally with men in the dignity of being human. Johnson concludes: “The christological question 'Who do you say that I am?' receives a response with yet another dimension when answered from the experience of believing women (Consider Jesus, p 97).

Once again, I remind theologians and pastoral ministers that communication studies, as it examines cultural context and communication, has concluded that "masculine and feminine styles of discourse are best viewed as two distinct cultural dialects rather than as inferior or superior ways of speaking" (Text, p 497).

And a reminder that Deborah Tannen's research work on genderlect styles shows that men's "report talk focuses on status and independence. Women's rapport talk seeks human connection." (p. 497)

I would like to hear your thoughts.
Communication Theology Questions

By Frances Forde Plude

The questions below urge theologians to participate in the decades ahead in a dialogue about how theology and communications intersect -- both in theory and in practice. Theology today is done differently because of the reflections of liberation theologians and feminist theologians. The author here proposes that a similar re-thinking of theology is needed to integrate communication and theological insights in our understanding of God, church, sacrament, and salvation history.

There has been a revolution in communications, just as we have witnessed liberation and feminist revolutions. We now need a serious and systematic dialogue interweaving theology and communications -- both among theologians, and between theologians and communications scholars and practitioners. This could enrich the theory and practice of both disciplines. I believe strongly this will enable us to communicate effectively with the modern world, as Vatican II urged.

My reflections are based on theoretical doctoral studies at Harvard and MIT, two decades of experience in church media administration and production, along with theology studies.

However, here I am not talking about media programs; I am urging serious consideration of communication theories, communication processes, communication codes of meaning. Like theology itself, our communication studies have been enriched in recent decades by insights from anthropology, psychology, systems theory, and other intellectual disciplines. This is not about "the media". This is about theology. It is about how insights within communication studies can inform the theological enterprise. And I trust that our dialogue will continue systematically within CTSA in this decade. This is something to be constructed jointly by theologians and communications scholars and practitioners.

Questions About a Theology/Communication Dialogue

Work already accomplished

Theologians have acknowledged that Jesus Christ is the supreme self-communication of God. Avery Dulles noted in 1971 that "The Church Is Communications" (Catholic Mind, Vol. 69, pp. 6-16; emphasis added). Dulles has suggested that various models of church utilize varying communication approaches (The Reshaping of Catholicism, Chapter 7).
Paul Soukup, SJ, has stated: "For Lonergan, communication has a role as proclamation within theology -- appearing as the last of his eight functional specialties, but not informing the study of theology itself. More to the point ... would be Lonergan's insistence on the function of meaning in forming community." ("Communication Theories for Theologians," Soukup unpublished manuscript). Soukup has authored a review of the literature in Communication and Theology (1983). Hüring analyzes the impact of mass media in his Free and Faithful in Christ. And the insights of Jurgen Habermas have informed the cultural studies writings in communication, an obvious link to theological reflections.

Several conferences have been held bringing together theologians and communication scholars and practitioners. These were sponsored by the Gregorian University and the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture in London. Several books are in process, a result of these week-long seminars. One is a study of ecclesiology and communication, for example, edited by Patrick Granfield.

**What Needs to be Done**

If we imagine theologians and communications personnel are creating a tapestry, it will take varied threads for the totality to be visible. Some of the threads are mentioned above. However, many remain to be constructed.

Here are some questions I would like to pose:

- What are the roles of communication *processes* in the expression of religious truths?

- How do these communication processes change in varied communication *cultures* (oral cultures, print cultures, and the current digital video culture)?

- Do modern communication *technologies* alter human and societal communication *modes* and, thus, impact the search for religious meaning? (Some of my reflections on this are in my own chapter in the above Granfield book; there I reflect on some connections between interactive communications and *communio*).

- Where do communication concepts lie *within* the theology of Trinity (the self-communication of God), within sacramental theology (sign and symbol), within scripture studies (the communication of the Word), and other theology specialties?

- Should we abandon the study of "theology *and* communication" or "the theology *of* communication" and seek, instead, communication realities *within theology itself*?
• What is the role of "public discourse" in theology (explored somewhat by David Tracy and reflected in the church's current documents on communication)?

At a meeting at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago involving, among others, the theologians Robert Schreiter and Hermann Pottmeyer, these questions spurred discussion.

Well, this is a start. There are many other queries, many other threads. It may be one of the greatest challenges (and one of the greatest needs) is to construct such a tapestry to enable us to see, understand, and communicate God's Word as we move into new digital decades.
V. Global Conferences
Introduction

Numerous international conferences have been held considering the relationship, or integration, of communication and theology (or religion, in general). These conferences are covered in some detail in this section of our volume.
Cavalletti Conferences And Follow-Up Conferences

[Note: A more detailed analysis of the conferences follows in the next text.]

From 1984 to 1997, there have been eight Cavalletti conferences, as well as two Cavalletti-like conferences in the United States, each focused on aspects of the theology and communication conversation.

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

1984 Cavalletti 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 Cavalletti 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 Cavalletti IV: **Moral theology and communication**. Does the media world have an impact on moral theology? How might moral theologians take advantage of media products or of the work of communication scholars?

1988a Marquette University **Conference on moral theology and communication**. This follow-up conference addressed the same themes, bringing together additional scholars.

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

1989 Cavalletti 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 Cavalletti 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.


1997 Cavalletti VIII: Media, religion, and popular culture. How does popular culture express religious images, themes, and sensibilities? [This is the first of the Cavalletti-like conferences, held not at Villa Cavalletti, which the Jesuits had sold, but at another retreat center 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. (See further information in the Ariccia conference section).
Cavalletti Conferences: History And Analysis

By Paul A. Soukup, S.J.

[This paper was presented at the Theology and Communications Conference, Ariccia, Italy, September 7-12, 2007.]

Theology and Communication: The Cavalletti Conferences

Shortly after the foundation of the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture (CSCC) in the late 1970s, the Centre took on a major research project, examining the relationship—or lack of relationship—between communication and theology. Founded as a Jesuit contribution to the challenges posed by the communication media in the modern world, and building on the specific academic traditions of the Society, the CSCC quickly responded to bishops and others in the Church who sought a better understanding of communication.

Perhaps more specifically, the CSCC became part of a much wider Church response to the call of the bishops at the Second Vatican Council who, in Inter Mirifica (1963), the Decree on the Means of Social Communication, asked that “All the members of the Church should make a concerted effort to ensure that the means of social communication are put at the service of the multiple forms of the apostolate without delay and as energetically as possible, where and when they are needed” (n. 13). To support this, the Council further decreed that “Priests, religious, and laity should be trained at once to meet the needs described above” (n. 15).

Communio et Progressio, the more detailed and developed follow-up document mandated by the Council, continued this call, not only for specific training in the means of social communication, but for a more sophisticated understanding of communication in general. A training that grounds a person in the basic principles governing the working of the media in human society, as explained above, is nowadays clearly necessary for all. If their character and function is understood, the means of communication genuinely enrich individual minds. (n. 64). Communio et Progressio further calls for preparation of priests and religious in these areas (n. 164) and asks religious orders to consider how best they can help (n. 177). For the Society, part of the answer was research.

After its start, the CSCC explored not only the role of the media in society, but also more specifically how seminarians could best be prepared according to the mandates of Inter Mirifica and Communio et Progressio. The role of communication in seminary education forms a recurring theme in briefing papers prepared by the CSCC staff in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The 1980s also saw added impetus to understanding the religious role of social communication in the rise and initial success of the televangelists—religious evangelical preachers using
television—in the United States. There the availability of multiple cable television channels led to a blossoming of this evangelical movement, which until that time had remained relatively unknown in the country. Bishops and others asked whether the Catholic Church should undertake the same kind of work. They, together with the main Protestant denominations, debated the theological pros and cons of such a work. Many, deeply suspicious of the popular quality of the preaching and its rudimentary theology, looked for ways to rebut the movement.

The CSCC librarian, James McDonnell, prepared an initial bibliography of relevant books and papers on the topic. He and Sister Mary Schelling then wrote a proposal for the integration of communication into seminary education. For that vision to take hold, they needed additional preparations. Against the background of these positive and negative concerns, Soukup (1983) on behalf of the CSCC, prepared a detailed review of published literature touching on communication and theology. Working from a grid in which six different approaches to communication intersected four key theological questions, Soukup organized hundreds of books and articles from over a 30-year time span. The review made it clear that questions of communication were not new to theology and that few theologians and communication scholars read one another’s works. The organizational grid demonstrated, however, that greater contact between theology and communication would bear valuable results.

At more or less the same time the CSCC had Soukup prepare his study, Robert A. White, S.J., then the research director of the CSCC, and Peter Henrici, S.J., then the dean of philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, engaged in a series of meetings to propose both general and specific paths of greater cooperation. On the one hand, some members of the Gregorian faculty and administration felt the need for special courses in communication. On the other hand, many felt they lacked the necessary resources and structure to begin a new program. Henrici and White proposed, among other things, that their two institutions begin by co-sponsoring a conference to explore communication and theology. That way, members of the various faculties of the Gregorian would gradually come to know more about communication. The conferences would also bring in faculty members from other places. This idea for a meeting and the success of the first conference, led to a series of conferences named for their site: the Jesuit retreat and conference center at Villa Cavalletti, outside of Rome. The plan for these conferences followed a simple method: about 25 invited, the participants, half theologians and half communication scholars, met for five or six days of conversation. From those conversations would emerge a book of essays produced by the participants after they had returned to their home institutions. The organizers realized that the choice of invited participants mattered greatly: they needed to find knowledgeable scholars, open to interdisciplinary work, who could quickly form research teams or partnerships. The CSCC’s growing network of individuals, located through its other research activities, proved fruitful recruiting ground.
Over time, the organizers, (Henrici and White for the first five conferences), gradually changed the initial Cavalletti model. They discovered after the first meeting that a more specific topic led to better dialogue and that asking the participants to arrive with drafts of papers gave people the opportunity for a more structured conversation. From 1984 to 1997, there would be eight Cavalletti conferences, as well as two Cavalletti-like conferences in the United States, each focused upon aspects of the theology and communication conversation. The first, with the general topic of communication and theology, proved good for discussion, but too general to yield any kind of coherent book. After this, Henrici and White chose specific topics, so as to better gather those with particular expertise and interests.

Here is a brief listing of the Cavalletti conferences and topics, as best as I can reconstruct them from meeting notes and references. (For some of the early conferences, the dates may be erroneous.) Also noted in the list are the books that emerged from a given meeting.

- 1983 Cavalletti I: Theology and communication: general approaches.

- 1984 Cavalletti 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?

BOOK: though the conference participants commissioned papers from each other and proposed a tentative outline for a book, none was produced. Some participants drew on the materials from this conference to develop approaches they later published independently of the conference (see, for example, Dulles, 1989).

- 1985 Cavalletti 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.

BOOK: though the conference participants commissioned papers from each other and proposed a tentative outline for a book, none was produced.

• 1988 Cavalletti 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?

• 1988a Marquette University Conference on moral theology and communication. This follow-up conference addressed the same themes, bringing together additional scholars.


• 1988 Santa Clara University Conference on 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 to reproduce the fruits of the Cavalletti conferences in other locations.


• 1989 Cavalletti 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 Cavalletti 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.


BOOK: Though conference participants outlined a book project, no book was published from this meeting.


- 1997 “Cavalletti” VIII: Media, religion, and popular culture. How does popular culture express religious images, themes, and sensibilities? [This is the first of the Cavalletti-like conferences, held, not at Villa Cavalletti, which the Jesuits had sold, but at another retreat center located across the lake from Castel Gondolfo.]

BOOK: Again, the participants had come with papers prepared and agreed on revisions for a book project, but the designated editors never completed the work.

While the Cavalletti conferences worked well in bringing scholars together and in promoting conversations, they did not succeed as well in making their discussions known among a wider audience. Promised publications simply did not materialize, for three reasons. First, participants did not prepare (or revise) essays in a timely manner. The failure of people to write essays prompted the organizers to ask for papers prepared in advance of the Cavalletti meetings. This succeeded in getting texts, but the initial texts lacked the benefit of the Cavalletti discussions. However, at least volume editors had something to work with. Second, editors did not finish their work in a timely fashion. Several of the Cavalletti meetings (I am aware of this for Cavalletti II
and VII) had sets of papers that remained unedited and never moved to publication. Third—and perhaps more limiting—the meetings lacked a publisher willing to bring out such collections. Only in 1993 did the CSCC staff manage to interest Sheed & Ward, a longtime publisher of Catholic intellectual work in the United States, to begin a series on Communication, Culture, and Theology (now titled Communication, Culture, and Religion by the new owners of the imprint). Sheed & Ward subsequently published four sets of Cavalletti papers.

These seven Cavalletti conferences have played a significant role in the development of the “middle history” of the dialogue between communication and theology. An early history had grown up in the work of individual theologians and communication professionals and around the Pontifical Council for Social Communication through the publication of Communio et Progressio. The Cavalletti conferences carried this work forward in creative ways by introducing theologians and communication scholars to one another’s work. One of the most helpful aspects of the Cavalletti meetings came out of their organization according to theological topics: fundamental theology, moral theology, ecclesiology, evangelization, and so on. Without this, much communication reflection on theology becomes scattered and ultimately unfocused.

Another positive contribution of the Cavalletti conferences was the network of people, many of whom have continued to collaborate in their reflections and writing. Third, the Cavalletti meetings inspired similar meetings in other parts of the world, often organized by those who had participated in the ones at Cavalletti. In these and other ways, the meetings set the context in which we work today. Fourth, the Cavalletti meetings enriched the literature on communication and theology through the foundation of Sheed & Ward’s Communication, Culture, and Theology (now Religion) book series. That series not only published the papers from four of the Cavalletti meetings, but also has brought out other books linking communication and theology: books examining Bible translation and media (Hodgson & Soukup, 1997; Soukup & Hodgson, 1999), film studies (Baugh, 1997; Malone, 2007; May, 2001), theological education (Hess, 2005), communication studies (Fortner, 2007), and theological ethics and the arts (Lamoureux & O’Neil, 2004).

The three major themes for our meeting at Ariccia, approach the relationship between theology and communication in similar ways to what we have seen of the Cavalletti conferences. 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 these movements. One could debate (and we should) whether these media serve this dual mission well, or whether interpersonal communication would better serve the basic functions of organizational communication and evangelization.
The second conference theme, “Theology and Communications”, really describes the whole purpose of the Cavalletti meetings. 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. Without going too much into the topic here, we can observe that these approaches carry the very real risks of people outside their areas of expertise making claims that more serious research does not support. Sadly, much wishful thinking characterizes work on both sides of the theology and communication divide. The Cavalletti approach attempted to minimize these difficulties through academic dialogue and partnership.

Finally, the third conference theme, Communication in Formation, returns to one of the initial motivations for the Cavalletti conferences: How should the Church prepare future ministers in terms of communication in the contemporary world? Clearly, communication forms a central part of any ministry in the Church.

What roles should rhetoric, interpersonal communication, and media studies, play in the formation of clergy and other ministers? Vatican II and the Pontifical Council for Social Communication asked for serious study of the issue, as have the Vatican Congregation for Seminaries and various national conferences of bishops. The Cavalletti approach consisted of preparing materials—books on fundamental theology, ecclesiology, moral theology, and so on—which could inform seminary classes without adding other courses to an already crowded set of requirements.

This brief overview of the Cavalletti conferences helps, I hope, to show where we have begun and where we might go. There is something very hopeful in bringing these questions to a new generation of scholars.

References


Seminars On Communication Theology Held At Conventions Of The Catholic Theological Society Of America (CTSA)

[These conferences were organized each year by Rev. Bernard (Bob) Bonnot and Frances Forde Plude. Note: The content summaries of all these CTSA presentations are in the next section below.]

a. Communication Theology Dialogue: Soukup, Plude, Philibert

b. Trinity as Self-Communication: John R. Sachs, S.J

c. Narrative Within Communication Theology: Terrence W. Tilley

d. Preaching as Communication Theology: Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P.

e. Nothing Sacred as Communication Theology: Bill Cain, Kevin Bradt

f. Reception Within Communication Theology: Richard Gaillardetz

g. Cultural Contest for Communication Theology: Kathryn Tanner

h. Music as an Expression of Theology and Communication: Thomas Boomershine, Tom Beaudoin, Eileen Crowley-Horak

i. Communication Theology Publishing: Paul Soukup, Steve Hrycyniak

j. Moving Beyond the Gutenberg Hologram and Communio as the Context of Lonergan’s Functional Specialties: David Robinson, Thomas Hughson
Summaries: Communication Theology Sessions At The Annual Convention Of The Catholic Theological Society Of America (CTSA)

For over a decade there was an annual Seminar in Communication Theology at the CTSA convention. These seminars had the support of UNDA-USA, the Association of Catholic Communicators. The organizers of the seminars were Father Bob Bonnot, a CTSA and an UNDA member, and Dr. Frances Forde Plude, a CTSA member and a Communication Professor. They usually arranged a pre-seminar meeting, months in advance, to plan for the CTSA event. All these meetings brought theologians and communication theorists and practitioners together to dialogue about the intersection between Theology and Communication. This contributed to a growing body of thought in Communication Theology, exposing CTSA members to concepts discussed, and allowing input from all audience participants.

Below are summaries of these seminar sessions – reports written by Bonnot for the CTSA Proceedings. Permission has been granted by the CTSA Proceedings to share the summaries.

1993: Richard Liddy, Peter Drilling, Celia Ann Cavazos,  
Lonergan’s Notion of Theology and Communication

Aetatis novae (1992) calls for "ongoing theological reflection upon the processes and instruments of social communication and their role in the Church and society."(32c) CTSA’s sister organization for broadcast communicators, UNDA-USA, requested this workshop. UNDA-USA First Vice-President, Bob Bonnot, moderated the discussion. Panelists included Richard Liddy (Seton Hall University), Peter Drilling (Christ the King Seminary), Celia Ann Cavazos (Diocese of San Antonio catechist). Frances Forde Plude contributed a paper.

Bonnot, noting that the convention fell between Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi, observed that communication is rooted theologically in Trinitarian communio and Incarnation. Lonergan's functional specialties and the dominance of mass communication processes in American culture provide further context.

Liddy shared Lonergan's conviction that without communication the other specialties in theology (research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics) are "in vain, for they fail to mature". Similarly, communication "will bear no fruit" without the other specialties. For Lonergan 'communication' refers to the whole area of pastoral theology. It is the effort to hear the Word of God out of in the conflicts of the past so that we can truly communicate God's Word in the present and for the future.

Lonergan ties communication closely to conversion. When someone talks or writes "over your head" conversion is necessary, for conversion grounds the common meaning which, through
communication, constitutes human community. Intellectual conversion is especially important. It enables one to understand simple people better and what their difficulties in understanding might be. Liddy exemplified such conversion in terms of "church". The unconverted see church as a "society," a "body" "out there" while the converted grasp "church" as "a community ... constituting itself through the communication of a particular message, 'the outer communication of Christ's message and ...the inner gift of God's love" (Method in Theology, 361-3).

In Chapter 14 of Method in Theology, Lonergan relates the communication process by which the Church continually re-constitutes herself to the wider process by which human society constitutes itself. He argues that theology's grasp of what is taking place in the Church must link up with other disciplines that study what is taking place beyond the Church.

Plude confirmed the need to link theology with other disciplines, including her own which studies communication processes in different cultures and the varied ways codes of meaning are expressed. Great progress has been made in this field as in theology. Plude asserted the need to move beyond "a theology of communication" or "theology and communication" to "communication theology," as in "liberation theology" or "feminist theology". Theologians need to discover communication realities within theology itself and theological realities within contemporary communication processes. She expressed appreciation for the work of Dulles (The Reshaping of Catholicism, Ch.7), of Häring (his analysis of the impact of mass media in Free and Faithful in Christ), for Tracy's explorations of "public discourse," and for Soukup's review of the literature (Communication and Theology, 1983).

Plude challenged theologians to identify communication concepts within the theology of Trinity, sacrament, and scripture. She asked how modern communication technologies alter human communication modes and thus impact the search for religious meaning and its expression? She pondered the role of "public discourse" in theology.

Drilling translated Lonergan's notion that the church labors "to persuade people to intellectual, moral, and religious conversion ..." (Method, 361) into more relational, interpersonal, and communicative terms. He proposed that the objective of Christian ministry is "to invite persons, individually and communally to communion and conversation" -- with God and with others.

Drilling distinguished Christian ministry (Rahner's 'pastoral theology,' Lonergan's 'communication') in terms of word, sacrament and care: ministry of word initiates and promotes divine-human conversation (interpersonal, intimate, truthful, responsible and loving); ministry of sacrament initiates, promotes and restores divine-human communion (a sense of belonging to one another, being at home with one another, sharing intimate, creative and healing life); ministry of care creates the conditions for ministry of word and sacrament.
Drilling traced how the ground of Christian ministry moved from power to communication. Earlier ministry was grounded in the juridical notions of power (of orders or of jurisdiction). Pius XII grounded ministerial action in the more theological notion of the Mystical Body of Christ. (Mystici corporis). Vatican II (Lumen gentium) grounds ministry in the self-communicative activity of the divine, trinitarian communion of persons. In this theology, the church is a people consisting of equal persons with diverse gifts but all united through mutual self-giving, thus made one with the unity of the Trinity itself. This mutually self-communicating people constitute a sacramental presence of Jesus in the world, ministering through word, sacrament and care to enable church to enter into communion and conversation with the triune God and one another, thereby beginning a world order constituted by communion and conversation. Communication is at the heart of God, of Church, of ministry, of world.

Cavazos explored catechetics as a case study of how theology matures in communication. Catechesis examines the meaning and value of everything created, including the products of human efforts, to show how they illumine the mystery of God and are illumined by God's Word. But Catechesis must also adapt to the age, culture, and individual needs of specific audiences, if it wants to not "go over their heads," but rather get through and convert persons.

Cavazos presented catechesis as the "resounding" or "echoing back" of the Divine Word as it penetrates human life. She sketched several criteria of catechesis: it must be Trinitarian and Christocentric; it must communicate the message in its entirety; it must adapt to the circumstances of those being catechized; it must interpret present life or experience in the light of revelation. She noted the historical use of communication media in catechesis. Contemporary media occasions an "event," concretizing concepts and enabling a shared experience which bonds persons and gives rise to symbols which evoke the experience for still others. Thus the image/symbol of Our Lady of Guadalupe grounds a deep, strong, steadfast, non-clerical, faith and a less institutional, more communitarian, church drawing persons to creative service and missionary responses. Similarly the movie "Brother Sun, Sister Moon" enables young adults who could not speak doctrinally about "sin" to name obstacles to their living the Gospel message. Today's media culture requires that catechesis and theology move beyond an argumentative modality that appeals mainly to the mind toward the symbolic media environment that engages persons more fully. This need is urgent; we have no choice if we are to develop ministry adequate to our mission of passing on the faith to current generations.

Edmund Arens (Frankfurt) observed that German culture is not yet so dominated by electronic media, but noted Habermas’ emphasis on parables as symbolic action with a cognitive dimension. Mary Marrocco (Ontario) expressed the frustration of attempting to catechize baptized persons who have never been converted, endorsing the need for communicative theology that converts persons. Charles Montenot, SJ, (Fordham) confirmed the impact of media on catechesis in the Bronx. Bishop Joseph Galante (San Antonio) argued that Catholics must
learn to use the media more effectively to present the one who calls us to conversion and enables us to enter communion and conversation – Jesus.

1994: Paul Soukup, S.J. Frances Forde Plude, Paul Philibert, O.P.,
*Theological Reflection and Communication Studies*

"The very structures of theological discourse are so linked to the structures of communication that we cannot responsibly do theology without a careful consideration of the theories of communication." So summarized Philibert after presentations in which Soukup challenged the U.S. theological community to develop a distinctive approach to theology that seriously considers the mass media and Plude proposed that communication theories will impact theology much the same way as liberation and feminist studies have. "If we remain frozen in texts and hermeneutics, we will miss opportunities to communicate," Philibert said.

Soukup's paper on "Theological Reflection and Communication" argued that theologians should address contemporary communication products and processes as fully as their religious and academic forebears did the media of their eras (Augustine with rhetoric for example). If anything, the demand for such reflection grows with the increasing influence of communication on culture (the "chief means of information and education" for many according to John Paul II), especially in North America. After exploring that influence, Soukup suggested three fruitful areas for reflection: (1) the culture and the inculturation of religious communication; (As liberation theology grew from the experience of people in Latin America's oppressive culture, communication theology should grow from the experience of people in the global communication culture); (2) how should the Church communicate today – by sharing information? by telling stories? by using mass media? and (3) the ways in which different models of the Church lead to different communicative practices. Soukup observed that all Christians, communication professionals, and theologians should carry out this reflection, each group according to its particular capacities. He concluded by sketching the possibilities for theologians moving from Scripture and theological concepts to communications and culture, and vice-versa -- through a re-reading of the Scriptures, through imaginative applications of theological categories (incarnation, Trinity, etc.), and through the use of film and television as points of departure ("snapshots" of our world) for theological exploration.

Plude proposed that the "word" informs both theology and communication both as content and as vehicle of transmission. What happens when "the word" is altered – when the communication content and the transmission technologies change, as for example in Incarnation? The introduction of printing clearly influenced both the rise of democratic thought and Reformation. Communication studies can help theologians and church grasp and respond to the dramatic communication changes currently underway.
Plude surveyed six communication scholarship themes and trends generated by four decades of communication research and scholarship: (1) linear message models, including message distortion; (2) propaganda studies and consciousness formation; (3) media agenda-setting, especially through "the news;" (4) media economics, the rise of information "gatekeepers" and public policy; (5) communication and culture formation through the telling of stories (anthropology); and (6) semiotics and linguistic analysis. Plude reflected especially on the impact of new communication technologies in promoting human interaction and cooperative alliances; and offered practical suggestions for theological inquiry to enrich the integration of theology and communication.

Plude especially argued that interactive, two-way technologies represent an epistemological turning point in communication research -- moving from dyads to forums. She identified three specific effects of the interactive two-way communications revolution: (1) the flattening and decentralization of organizations; (2) the participatory character of communication flow with feedback loops, giving rise to 'shared minds' within these forums; and (3) the importance of access by all to the instruments of communication, enabling "power with" and reducing "power over." She proposed this "communication revolution" as a metaphor for a communio theology of church (elaborated by her in The Church and Communication, Patrick Granfield, ed., Sheed & Ward, 1994). She finds links between these new-technology changes and theological texts in Newman, Congar, Rahner, Lonergan, Dulles, Kasper, Schillebeeckx, Komonchak, and Häring. In her view, theologians and communicators must collaborate. The impact on theology will parallel that of liberation and feminist theories.

Philibert thanked Soukup and Plude for heightening our appreciation of the need for theological reflection upon the mass media. But now, he suggested, communications must enter into the work of theology itself, much as hermeneutics has done. Twenty years ago theologians were much engaged in addressing how hermeneutical questions would enter into theological discussion. CTSA's 1994 convention papers clearly demonstrate the fact that hermeneutics is now integral to the way we now do theology. Developing the insights of Soukup and Plude, Philibert suggested imagination and ecclesiology as two key ways in which communications theory affects theology.

The epistemology of communication research persuades us that the role of the imagination is central to effective theologizing. Meaning detonates not in utterance, but in connections created beneath the surface of logical exchange. The archeology of human interests is mediated by symbols of relation, desire, and transcendence. Imagination is the vehicle of this symbolic exchange. The principal negative force of mass media in our culture is that it destabilizes a healthy ecology of symbolic integrity that should include silence, aesthetic subtlety, and critical evaluative perspectives that take account of the values of the distinct and varied communities.
within society. We are responsible for insisting upon the integrity of a healthy symbolic ecology of this kind.

Relative to ecclesiology, as Plude has shown, not only the idea of the church but also the reality of the church is at issue when one addresses how gospel and moral tradition are mediated. The first principle of communicative responsibility is reciprocity. Cognitive developmental studies emphasize that moral maturity is rooted in cooperation and peer respect. So, for example, base communities are not only a formula for generating commitment, but also one of the best opportunities for the church to establish realistic contexts in which some evaluation and critique of the mass culture can become effectively expressed in the ordinary lives of Christian people in our society.

During discussion, Richard Liddy (Seton Hall) affirmed the need to integrate new technologies as students have become incapable of reading a book. Yet we must enable our symbols to detonate in their hearts and relationships, occasioning conversion. Fred Jelly (St. Mary's, Emmitsburg) concurred, evoking Harvey Cox's "post-literate era" in commenting that there is an explosion of books, but the more intelligent students will not read! Liddy worried that we may lose something in moving into the world of new technologies.

Kenneth Steinhouser (St. Louis U.), picking up on Plude's original observation that the Incarnation drastically changed the 'technology' of God's communication with us, reminded everyone of the move from scroll to codex and its impact on theology. While such changes of form do affect content, Tradition lives through such transitions. The codex, books organized into chapters and hierarchical society are inter-related. Theologians (content specialists) and communicators (form specialists) must collaborate if the gospel is to be enculturated in our era as in prior times.

Jane Redmont shared her sense of TV as the enemy of the printed and written word, which she honors as 'holy.' Cecilia Ranger (Maryhurst College) observed that the Great Northwest is highly unchurched but heavily computerized, modem-ized and interested in electronic bulletin boards. We must use these new 'meeting places' to get the gospel to such persons as single parents who cannot come to classes because they cannot get or afford a babysitter. Perhaps such electronic gatherings are forms of ek-eklesia, calling people out and together.

Pat Parachini, SNJM, reflected that we are not communicating with people in a way people can enter in to. We must learn to meet folks where they are, and many of them are into image. Mary Kay Oosdyke, OP, responded to the importance of interactive communications, expressing concern that as Church we do this poorly – for instance in the interactive parts of Liturgy.
Those present affirmed a desire to continue probing the interplay of theology and communication. The focus is "communication theology" rather than "theology of mass media." CTSA is an important forum for carrying such exploration forward, and several expressed the hope that the issue might get before the whole society. Ladislaus Orsy, SJ, Georgetown, noted that CTSA meets for only a few days a year, so institutions must carry this work forward. Peter Dirr (CTNA) proposed using the media to move ahead, perhaps setting up an electronic meeting for theologians and communicators.

This workshop started from the conviction that communication needs theology to work toward ministry maturation in the Church. It concluded with the strong conviction, succinctly captured by Philibert above, that theology needs communication to be responsibly done in our communication culture. CTSA remains an appropriate forum for pursuing the blend.

1995: John R. Sachs, SJ,

*Trinity and Communication: The Mystery and Task of Self-Communication*

Looking into the immanent Trinity won't much advance theological efforts to understand communication. But focus on the economic Trinity as God's saving us through Jesus and the Spirit will. Sachs proposed that salvation is realized and experienced (or not) in and through authentic human (self) communication. Jesus' life and ministry of self-sacrificing love consisted of such communication. In him, God's self-communication and human self-communication are one. Hence communication is a critical subject for theological reflection. Some implications: (1) we must communicate ourselves and an experience of salvation, not simply information, even about God; (2) communication must build solidarity with the voiceless, giving them a voice as Jesus did. The Internet offers new possibilities here.

Discussion explored what "authentic" self-communication is when the communication requires the collaboration of many persons, as in many media productions. Telling the truth, avoidance of distorting idols, and inclusion of all pertinent voices were suggested as criteria.

Plude distinguished communication (self-revelation thru personal interaction) and communications (different technologies). She emphasized the dialogic dimension of communication in the economic Trinity. Access is a justice/gospel issue; salvation takes place in daily interactive communication that 'shares meaning;' Communication technology should impact theological anthropology.

Joseph Bracken called for a social Trinity to ground a communitarian approach to reality, an interactive style of communication and the possibility of group vs. individual communication, as in collaborative media productions. Might such reflection on the immanent Trinity help resolve many blocks to human communication and resolve the dilemma of one person's sense of self-
communication conflicting with that of another? Sachs held that looking to the behavior of Jesus and our experience of Spirit will provide more insight than speculating about the intra-trinitarian dynamics. Michael Warren asserted that religious people tend to be inferior to secular persons in using communication technology. He hoped for more collaborative Church communication efforts.

Redmont reflected that theologians must reflect critically on the culture, and ours is a communication culture. Further, we are living through an epistemological turning point unlike any experienced since Gutenberg. Theologians must reflect on communication. Redmont observed the explosion of new 'high' technologies in our times among the wealthy and the rise of 'high touch' Pentecostalism among the poor. Both are intense forms of communication; both are works of the Spirit. Redmont sees the historicity of Sachs' approach correlating well with communication, which exists inside history. She worried over Sachs emphasis on self-communication, and a loss of the plural and dynamic sense of God that Trinity evokes.

Major conclusions of this session are that communication belongs on the theological agenda; that Trinity is an appropriate "centering point" for such reflection; and that the economic Trinity is fruitful but an approach through immanent Trinity might also illuminate authentic human communication and thus salvation in a communications culture.

1996: Terrence W. Tilley, Angela Ann Zukowski, Edmund Arens,
Narrative and Communication Theology in a Postliterate Culture

Tilley proposed that media have both affect and effect on us. Communication constitutes selves and communities, including religious selves and church. When the language changes, so does what it effects in persons and in communities. Because the media of the day shape our imagination of what family, friendship, and "communio" can be and become, self and community in a postliterate culture are not the same as in a preliterate culture, and cannot be. Theology must take account of this.

Narrative is central to communication. The meanings of words and images, including faith meanings, are indeterminate until set within a narrative. In turn, media shape the narrative. Faith is "first in the feet," in life's journeys which become stories. Doctrinal formulae and moral rules are shorthand for those stories. The sense of self, of communio, and of faith cannot remain the same when a culture goes post-literate and shapes narratives anew.

Theology then must take seriously the images current in today's media and the narratives in which they are set. Images of shattered families and friendships, for instance, shape shattered selves and communities. "Redemption," "transubstantiation," "real presence," and pieties which express such, all mean something different from what they did fifty years ago. Postliterate
persons cannot recover those meanings as such. Theologians must attend especially to television's endless, rapid-fire stream of fragmented images. The culture TV creates requires more than a repackaging of old meanings. The change is not accidental, but substantial. Theologians must learn this new language to convey faithful meanings.

Arens responded positively, noting that faith is, essentially, communication, and theology is communication about communication. Herbert Marcuse taught that communication can be used to either effect or distort community. Accordingly, theology needs a critical theory of communication to help people understand the character of true communication.

Zukowski asserted that global and cyber cultures are generating the new narratives by which people live. The Church must dialogue with these new cultures and translate her continuing experience of the faithful love of the Triune God into narratives which make sense in these cultures. Otherwise believers' lips will be out of sync with their hearts. Increasingly individuals will create these narratives themselves, telling in support groups and cyber-chat rooms their own stories of the Triune God-with-us through Jesus to whom they are disciples in the Spirit.

Colella's experience confirms that people use whatever communication tools culture provides to express and "redesign" themselves. Theology must learn how to proclaim and manifest the Good News today by engaging with the leading creators of the new media. At the same time, theology and Church must address people at all stages on the communication spectrum—preliterate, literate, and postliterate. J. Redmont and G. Baum underlined the pastoral challenge of this complex situation. M. Campbell noted students think very differently from their teachers and have difficulty stepping outside of their stream of consciousness.

Discussion touched on Mother Angelica, media literacy, wisdom theology, and the Chinese rites controversy.

**1997: Mary Catherine Hilkert, P.P. and Thomas O’Meara, O.P.,**

*Preaching as Communication Theology*

In *Naming Grace*, Hilkert develops a theology of preaching in terms of an imminent, sacramental imagination, contrasting it with a transcendent, dialectical theology of preaching, typically Protestant. The latter articulates a *collision* of the divine and the human, the former a *correlation* of the divine and the human.

Dialectical theology imagines God breaking into the human situation through preaching; sacramental imagination conceives preaching as interpreting or naming the presence of God already there. Hilkert emphasizes the depths of human experience where one encounters the mystery of God. Often today such experience is of suffering. Preaching interprets such
experience through Scripture, liturgy, and doctrine. The community not only receives and responds to the preaching; it prepares it. The effective preacher takes account of the community's diverse experiences. Ultimately, what is preached is what the community hears.

Duffy applauded the title of Hilkert's book and judged her approach long overdue, then explored preaching in a multimedia world. The media form both preacher and community. They emphasize entertainment, surrounding us with secular symbols and rituals woven into engaging narratives. Believers must be prophetic, contemplative, and remembering people to discern and preach the mystery of God within this culture. Bernet reflected on Hilkert's affirmation of community as central to the preaching event. She encouraged surveys of parishioner expectations as a way of listening to the community and making it an active part of preaching.

Effective preachers have a deep and energetic faith, clarity of purpose and point, and are themselves alive in the word. They appreciate that God is alive in the people and do not speak down to them. They help people name their experience. Such preachers need to be extended through the media. Doctrine has a role in preaching but not in the mode of doctrine. Doctrinal reaching must be mystagogical, connected with scripture and liturgy.

O'Meara responded that doctrine seems cold, fearful, and authoritarian. Actually the word simply means teaching. Good preaching brings doctrine out of abstraction by connecting it with people's lives, naming the grace there. Accordingly, effective preachers use stories and metaphors from the "thought forms" used by the people to whom they preach.

Discussion explored Hilkert's conviction that preaching names grace resident in the community before the preaching. Many hearers of the word consider the deeply human where grace is found to be purely secular. Preaching must surprise such hearers, evoking from them an "Aha!" Since much preaching today takes place outside liturgy, the structures of preaching are changing. Today's media, with their imaginative creativity and audience appeal, are important thought forms for preachers.

"Naming grace" also articulates well what is going on in spiritual direction, which enables people to name their own grace and thus to preach to themselves. If Lonergan is correct that theology without communication is in vain, preaching is a primary instance of communication theology.

1999: Richard R. Gaillardetz, Mary McCormick,
Ecclesial Reception, Communication, and the Development of Doctrine

Richard Gaillardetz defined reception as "the process by which some teaching, ritual, discipline or law is assimilated into the life of a church". Theologians have been reflecting on tradition since 1600, on reception only since Vatican II. He sketched two models of reception, one within
a pyramidal/hierocratic concept of church, the other within *communio* ecclesiology. While the church conceived herself in early centuries as "a spirit-constituted interdependent web of reciprocal relations among persons and communities," reception was the common mode of sharing. In that context, dialogical reciprocity made sense. As a hierocratic concept of church gained ascendancy, a more juridical notion of obedience prevailed as the proper response to formal teaching.

Gaillardartz elaborated on the dynamic between magisterium and *sensus fidelium*, one of Ormond Rush's 12 loci of reception. There is a triangular process: the community's (A) Expression of Faith (in liturgy, devotion, art etc., as well as in word) is received by the magisterium, which gives it (B) Official Formulation. The community receives this Official Teaching by (C) an Assimilation that transforms the community and gives rise to renewed Expressions of Faith (A). Two moments of reception are involved (vs. one in the hierocratic-obediential model). The starting point is the community's lived experience and testimony rather than official teachings. Both magisterium/bishop and church community receive from, and transmit to, one another. Thus the church functions as a "community of reception."

In both moments, non-reception can occur. After briefly reviewing some of the contributions from the field of hermeneutics and literary theory, Gaillardetz noted that communication theory has moved from a Transportation model to a Forum model. The latter entails communication as a reciprocal act of sharing in which the listener selectively appropriates what is communicated. The Forum model emphasizes the interactive, dialogical dimension of communication. It is a reciprocal act of sharing. Paul VI opened the theological door to this emphasis in *Ecclesiam Suam* that proposes dialogue as a transcendent opening of the divine and a constitutive dynamic of the church. Conciliar thought regarding communication matured from the weak *Inter mirifica* (1962) to the strong *Communio et progressio* (1972), a document grounded in *communio* theology.

Gaillardetz concluded that disciplined and intentional conversation between theologians and experts in communication theory can advance theology much as has theology's dialogue with philosophical and literary hermeneutics.

Vince Miller suggested that communication is still seen as a transmission of content more than as a bricolage of symbols to be negotiated. Jane Redmont focused on who gets to participate in the conversation. What publics are significant and get heard? Paul Lakeland noted that outside the *communio* model there is only one authoritative moment. Bob Bonnot encouraged study of the historic move to juridical obedience as the proper response to church teaching.

Frances Forde Plude discussed how interactive communication technologies impact reception. Communication and theology should not be separate fields but one, communication theology
(like feminist theology and liberation theology). Obediential reception parallels communication as proclamation while reciprocal reception parallels communication-as-exchange, the model preferred today by anthropology and cultural studies. The interactive dimension of communication, with feedback loops, is as important as the move from verbal to visual communication. The Internet, the telephone, the fax and now computers facilitate interaction.

Equity of access is important. When people can participate, they insist on talking. Such interaction is a metaphor for a more dialogical church. Computers constitute an epistemological turning point, opening cyberspace for the soul for the first time since Dante. The way audiences receive mass media programs parallels the developing theology of reception (seen in the research of Lynn Schofield Clarke). The process is conversation rather than proclamation. Schreiter's *New Catholicity* reflects this.

Frank Buckley requires students to use e-mail with him and among themselves. This transforms the learning process. Interactivity impacts a community's unity or lack thereof. These notions must get into seminary education and the training of future leaders. (Redmont) Paul Soukup observed that there are many different fields within communication studies. Mass media studies give rise to a transportation model, but classical rhetoric and studies of conversation require a different model. Walter Ong, S.J., articulates what happens to human consciousness when communication technology changes, as from oral to literate to print to electronic. This evolution begs the question of how really open our “democratic dialogue” really is. Who gets to speak? Who uses the Internet (currently 50 million do, 6.5 billion do not!)? In fact, technology enables people to live within self-selected communities, isolated rather than open to one another.

Discussion explored who counts among the *fideles* consulted to determine the faith of the community. To be Catholic means that we cannot really shut anyone out. Bishop Remi de Roo mentioned that he held a "dialogical synod" in Victoria B.C. and experienced during it many of the notions being discussed. People insist on participating and refuse to be marginalized because they care about the truth. Through dialogue they discover things in the tradition that were never taught. Much lies there unrecognized, much is not 'word.' Orlando Espin commented on the non-reception of popular faith expressions by church authorities. John Thiel urged a retrospective line from the church's current faith expression backward to the tradition. What the people have received and assimilated into their faith life is the tradition!

**2000: Kathryn F. Tanner, Mary Hess,**

*A Cultural Contest and Theological Communication*

This continuing group contends that new communication technologies provide a new interactive model for social processes of communication and that this new model has significant implications for how the nature and tasks of the church are conceived, including theology.
Kathryn Tanner examined the interactive model and its implications in terms of “A Cultural Contest and Theological Communication.”

Drawing on British cultural studies, Tanner explored three specific implications of the interactive communication model: (1) the church becomes a community of argument over fundamental Christian beliefs and values; (2) contest over the meaning of terms significant to the wider society is constitutive of communication processes that form the church; and (3) God communicates in and through the cultural contests identified in (1) and (2). All this is modeled in Christ.

British Cultural Studies contend that messages are constructed through contests or negotiations between contending forces, namely sender and receiver(s). This involves a certain 'competition,' such as one finds for example in U.S. political processes. In these processes, public debate and policy fights lash specific proposals to broadly shared civic values. Through that process political coalitions are fashioned that hold the society together and move it forward.

This same dynamic is operative in the church. It functions as a community of argument over fundamental Christian beliefs and values. Every member can somehow participate in the argumentation, whatever the particular structure of their church. Power differences abound in this model. The elites (e.g. clergy, theologians) generally hold the power to create messages for popular consumption, but the recipients of those messages (laity, non-theologians) have the ability to refashion those messages, adapting them to their own non-elite interests. The new communication technologies may undercut this control of the elites since they empower many different levels of society and church to generate messages that reach a large public. Still the dynamics of cultural contest will hold. For example, today anyone can generate a website, but visitors to said site are totally free to use it as they wish.

Discussion confirmed Tanner's thesis. One participant noted that the power to disregard has always been present in the church! Another participant observed that meaningful homilies are the fruit of negotiation between homilist and congregation. The group began negotiating the meaning of Tanner's remarks with her!

In a second section, Tanner elaborated on the way that the church’s efforts to communicate to the wider world involve cultural contest and how through that very engagement, meaning is constructed both within the church and in society. The church does not bring to society a meaning it has either received as such from God or completely worked out in isolation from the society, communicating said message in a kind of second moment. Rather the church arrives at its sacred meanings only through interaction with the society with which it wants to share its wisdom. Eucharist is an example. The church best arrives at its meaning by exploring with the society the significance of table fellowship generally in the society. Thus Christian beliefs,
values and practices emerge from tension-filled interaction with the beliefs, values and practices of the larger society.

Tanner concluded with the thesis that God communicates with us through this very process. God does not so much tell us something that we are then to tell others, but challenges our beliefs, values and practices, wrestling with us until they are transformed by grace. God is present to us in this very process of meaning-making and cultural transformation. The incarnation can be viewed as this kind of contest between the Jewish-Greco-Roman humanity of Jesus and the Word that assumed it, transforming that culturally shaped humanity into the supreme manifestation of God's love in the world. This process continues endlessly in the efforts of the church to transform the wider world.

Mary Hess responded to Tanner from the perspective of religious education, applauding the cultural studies approach to the reality of communication. She finds it a great improvement over the sender-message-receiver model. It is more adequately descriptive of what in fact happens. She especially appreciated Tanner's look at the power relationships between “elites” and “non-elites,” finding them quite pertinent to the theological contestations going on at the grass-roots level among Catholics.

Picking up on Tanner’s notion of God being revealed, in and through our arguments, Hess challenged theologians to explain how God is being revealed in and through our society's engagement with commercial mass-mediated popular culture. Today’s religious media are irrelevant to many while contemporary commercial pop culture provides them with religious meaning. Theologians need to help us understand what is going on, what God is revealing. Hess pointed to such films as “The Matrix,” “A Galaxy Quest,” and “American Beauty” as relevant examples.

Hess further proposed that much public reasoning is taking place in and through digitally produced media today rather than in traditional institutions of education and research. Mass mediated popular culture is one of the primary places where people are making meaning. Theologians and the magisterium need to engage their imaginations and get involved in the cultural contests raging around them in new and responsible ways.

Joan Mueller inquired “Who is the elite?” in this context. John Farelly noted that our heritage is faith and reason, but faith and culture are much richer and need to be addressed. If, as Hess argues, we have moved from philosophical argumentation to sympathetic identification as the prevailing way of persuasion, then theologians must develop and express their thought in a fresh way. One participant proposed that theologians need to see themselves in a missionary role to the culture, venturing forth from the academy.
The arts provide special ways of knowing and distinct modes and languages for doing and expressing "theology." To Karl Rahner, "theology cannot be complete until it appropriates [the] arts as an integral moment of itself." This session explored music as a particularly apt mode of theology in "the digital era." Boomershine dates the digital era from the early 1960s when TV became dominant and Vatican II began. A distinct mode of communication stamps any era and creates systems that facilitate its specific mode. Digital communication is distinctive psychologically in being multi-sensory and sociologically in being highly commercial and consumption-oriented.

Boomershine approached music by analyzing God's dominant ways of communicating with us throughout history and the systems the believing community developed to facilitate God's self-communication. Following Barth, he sees three major forms of the Word - the Incarnate Word, the oral Word, and the written Word (Scripture and tradition). Each form generated distinct communication systems. In each one music played a role.

Music played a role in the life of the incarnate Word at three discernible points. Jesus probably chanted the scriptures in synagogue as was customary. He entered Jerusalem to triumphal, probably sung, acclamation. And Luke presents his mother as singing her Magnificat. Jesus' modality was verbal-oral. He formed his disciples by wandering about Galilee with them, talking. And they spread his word primarily by talking. The early church was basically a network or system for keeping the energy of the Word orally strong, telling others about Jesus.

Though like Socrates, Jesus wrote nothing, his ministry relocated theology from an oral-tribal setting to a literate one. He wandered Galilee teaching but then sent his disciples into the literate Greco-Roman world to share his message. This social relocation led his disciples to record his life and teaching in texts. These eventually became normative. Most believers have experienced Jesus through oral and/or literate media - preaching or texts.

Music enhanced this transmission through chanting or the singing of associated acclamations and hymns. Church leadership complemented its congregation based oral system with literary institutions – scriptoria, libraries, schools – and captured the chants in writing also. Singing the texts remains common to this day, including in the West, until recently. As the printing press made reading increasingly private and silent, people grew accustomed to hearing the texts read with some music before and after. Protestant services became largely sermon and song.

Thus the energy of the Word generated in time oral and literary systems of communication - congregations, libraries, schools, seminaries, universities. Against that history, Boomershine
pondered the church's failure to use today's digital media in its worship and teaching and to develop institutions to facilitate that use. He attributes this failure to the church's attachment to the oral and written modes of communication. God however is using the digital media that are transforming education, commerce and culture. One could argue that God may be using digital media in the personal enterprises of such televangelists as Pat Robertson, Paul Crouch and Mother Angelica. God may even be the communicator behind the surprising impact of secular digital artists like Jackson Brown. Brown does not intend to create religious music, yet people report that his music opens them to God. Christian Rock is a digital format through which God is reaching people today, independent of the institutional church.

Turning to music as such, Boomershine opined that the digital era has seen more significant change in music than in any other area of our 'God talk.' Since 1960 the organ has given way to guitar and drums and digital keyboards. These instruments bring out a beat that enables physical movement by the people, involvement, participation. Digital amplification of the voice, as Brother Roger's at Taize in the context of simple chants, allows an intimacy of tone that has transformed the proclamation of the Word: there is no preaching at Taize. Taize communicates theologically through music. Christian Rock establishes social identity for many young believers.

Music, with story and image, is the language of the digital age. Story has emerged as an important dimension of preaching and theology since 1960. Music does not organize its message in terms of concepts and words and arguments. Music gets at something deeper and more meaningful in people, connecting profoundly with the person's life and connecting that life with God. Because of that, Boomershine believes music will be integrated again into the telling of the sacred story, as in singing the Gospel, but now with a beat. (Chant has no beat.) And he believes that as music and other digital forms of communication become still more dominant, the cultural location of theology will shift from university libraries to something new and different, systems God is shaping even if the Church is not.

In discussion, Frank Buckley asserted that we are dealing with a left brain/right brain shift. Mary Carroll remarked on the popularity of Hildegard of Bingen's music and of the Spanish monks' chant. Such music puts people into an altered state of consciousness, enabling an experience that the merely verbal expression of the Gospel, oral or written, cannot. People today want an experience of God, not just words about God. Stephen Martin observed that many young people don't read books. New college-grad Shawn Wilkins cautioned about leaving truth behind. Boomershine affirmed that the goal is a synthesis that enables today's people to experience what the church holds precious and to know it as they know everything else.

Respondent Tom Beaudoin analyzed music epistemologically. Music is more than a container and carrier of verbal content that helps us remember the words. It is a distinct way of knowing, even theologically. Beaudoin offered four hypotheses: 1) musicality is an irreducible domain of
knowledge; 2) musicality is an irreducible domain of theological knowledge insofar as it functions as a source for theology; 3) musicality is an irreducible domain of theological knowledge as a mode of theology, complementing the conceptual-verbal-linguistic mode; 4) musical knowledge can rework other theological domains, offering standard theology such concepts and language as 'overtone' and such distinct logics as, for example, improvisation. As theology has various 'methods,' it likewise has various 'modes.' Musicality is one of them.

Beaudoin developed his first thesis, that music is an irreducible form of knowledge, on whose validity his other theses depend. Referencing Jeremy Begbie, David Sudnow and Richard Viladesau, he positioned music's kinetic images as irreducible to concepts. They are emotions, bodily states, feelings, all non-verbal. A musician has 'handful knowledge.' Her hands know! Beaudoin called for exploration of such knowledge as poiesis, paralleling theology's use of Aristotle's other kinds of knowledge: theoria and praxis. He cited Psalm 49:4, "I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp."

Group discussion reflected on the profound impact singing the Eucharistic prayer has on congregations; on dance as knowledge, portrayed in the film “Billy Elliott;” on traditional organ improvisation, responding to what has happened in the liturgy, as a form of liturgical jazz; and on the music of Bach and Mozart. The session closed noting music's power to communicate across generations.

2002: Paul A. Soukup, S.J., Steve Hrycyniak (Sheed and Ward Publishers),

Publishing Project in Communication Theology

The session brainstormed publication possibilities against the background of the developing field of communication theology. Bob Bonnot reviewed the nine years of Program Group sessions within CTSA, the capstone of that effort is having David Robinson as a plenary presenter this year, and the shift now to Research Group status. Paul Soukup recalled the attention given to communication at the Second Vatican Council and in subsequent documents; the history of the international Jesuit Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture from its founding in London to its "virtual" base now at Santa Clara University (http://cscc.scu.edu); his 1983 review of the literature on communication and theology for the Centre; and the series of Cavalletti seminars in Italy that resulted in the Sheed & Ward series of books on Communication, Culture and Theology.

He announced the continuation of that series under his joint editorship with Fran Plude. Fran Plude distributed three items and noted other documentation available, including an updated annotated list of publications. She explained the work of the International Commission on Religion, Communication and Culture and announced the Commission’s funding of full doctoral scholarships for five candidates each from Africa, Asia, and South America.
Steve Hrycyniak, Co-CEO of Sheed & Ward, affirmed continuing commitment of that press to its academic series on Communication, Culture and Theology while considering also popular and pastoral titles and formats. He noted that publications that simultaneously appeal to three distinct markets—bookstores, institutions, religious education, and the academy—work best for S&W. He offered S&W's assistance in finding an apt publisher for worthy proposals that do not fit S&W.

Against this background, those present offered thoughts on potentially fruitful directions for the further development of the field in the context of this CTSA Research Group. The following ideas surfaced:

- The media make us consumers. Theology needs to help people become agents: how can theology be transformational when interfacing with the media today?

- An emphasis on being agents can accent control. The current crisis in the Church manifests a need also for vulnerability, as modeled by Pope John Paul.

- Explore and apply the dominant theological theme of *communio* to communication.

- Develop the symbolic mode of thinking, doing theology and communicating in the context of *communio*, as in the sacraments, liturgy, and eucharist.

- Probe Lonergan's emphasis that communication is the apex of theology and a challenge to the other dimensions of theology.

- Deepen understanding of the core principles on which people base their lives which shape all communication they receive.

- Develop awareness of author, recipient, and observer/consumer.

- Schools and parishes need timely instructional resources with good theology.

- How can theology help bring everyone to the conversation in a fragmented, "market-segmented" world? Beyond "dialog" (which often means duo-dialog), there is a need for "poly-dialog."

- Consider communication across the life cycle and the church's need to do intergenerational communication.
• Theology and its expression need to encourage and enable people to express themselves, moving them from consumption to generosity (e.g. "God's Photo Album" and "Letters to Mothers and Fathers").

• Consider use of CD-ROMs, hypertext publication, and alternative modes of access to theology's fruits, such as the arts—plays, paintings, performance, creative self-expression. With these ideas and emphases, the 2003 Research Group on Communication Theology in Cincinnati will work on two specific publications: (1) an expansion of David Robinson's plenary challenge to move theology beyond the "Gutenberg Hologram"; and (2) an exploration of communio in the context of Lonergan's emphasis on communication as a major functional specialty within theology—both including pastoral application.

2003: David Robinson, Thomas Hughson, Moving Theology Beyond the Gutenberg Hologram; Communio as the Context of Lonergan’s Functional Specialties

The objective of this session was to advance the two concepts selected last year for potential publication. The session concluded with both projects queued for eventual publication.

David Robinson, of the University of San Francisco, presented a manuscript of his 2002 plenary presentation with Mary Ann Hinsdale's response, integrated vignette by vignette. This contrasts with the presentation in the CTSA Proceedings 2002 where they are presented as two related, but successive, presentations. Thus, the new Robinson version models a dialogical, nonlinear style of presenting and learning, and points toward the publication of a different kind of theological text or book.

With the group's input Robinson now envisions evolving and communicating his insight through the engagement of so many as five conversation partners from various disciplines around the proposed topic and title of God and Complexity. The work will be formatted in innovative ways to reflect a transdisciplinary approach to the God question and associative rather than linear modes of inquiry and presentation. The exchange will approach God in terms of complex systems marked by self-connecting, self-adapting, and emerging dynamics through which something fresh and new emerges.

The work will reflect and hopefully advance the science-theology dialog of our times. The group included a representative of a major publisher who concurred with the value of the project in itself and the importance of developing an innovative way of communicating theological thought and work through the publication of a different kind of 'book.' One model of innovative layout for presentation of substantive thought is As the Future Catches You by Juan Enriquez (New York: Crown Business, 2001).
Thomas Hughson, of Marquette University, outlined an exploration of *communio* by bringing to bear on it Lonergan's rich sketch of communication as an intrinsic, essential, partially constitutive dimension of human existence and theology. His exploration will accent the outward mission of communion in plural context, especially insofar as this involves renewal of the diocesan church through communication. Hughson proposes exemplifying the communicative renewal of *communion* in such specific diocesan experiences as the fate of the *Economic Justice for All* pastoral, the Common Ground project, and the response of the local church to the clergy sexual abuse crisis.

At CTSA 2004 this Research Group's final session will preview and critique a draft of Robinson's proposed work and will review Hughson's further elaboration of the communio-communication study. Robinson's publication is envisioned for late 2005 and Hughson's for 2006 or later.
Communication Studies; Bridging Gaps In Our Theology Metaphors

By Frances Forde Plude

[This text was published in New Theology Review, June 10, 1994, as part of an article from a trio of authors (Plude, Soukup, and Philibert). The three presentations were originally organized for the Catholic Theology Society of America’s Baltimore convention.]

…the spoken word is the normal vehicle of faith. In our times the "word" also becomes image, colors, and sounds, acquiring varied forms from the diverse media of social communications. (Medellin Conference, 1968).

The word informs both theology and communication. Words serve us as content and as vehicles of transmission. What happens when "the word" is altered and the communication content and the transmission technologies change?

For people of Christian faith, the communication between God and the people of God was altered dramatically when God’s Word entered history to interact as person with all of humanity. Today we are living in another period of altered communication, one spurred primarily by technological tools. All of us have had our patterns of work, of relationship, of faith, dramatically altered by a tumultuous communications revolution similar in its impact to the introduction of printing in the fifteenth century.

Most of us learned in textbooks, even in high school, there was a connection between the introduction of the technology of printing and the democratization of thought. Is there any doubt this played a role in the Reformation (Eisenstein 1979)? Similar structural changes are underway today in a global community linked now by digital bits as well as printed documents. What are the implications for those of us who care deeply about effective communication among ourselves, and with our God?

In these pages I will (1) provide an overview of communication scholarship trends, (2) offer some reflections concerning the impact of new technologies that promote human interaction and cooperative alliances, and (3) make some practical suggestions to enrich our communication-theology integration.

Communication Scholarship

The dialogic aspect of communication study has emerged from much previous theory. Early communication research stressed the impact of messages moving from a single source to a receiver, with the possibility, of course, that the message received was not necessarily the same
one sent, due to variations of perception, a sort of "static" that interferes with the message content (Shannon and Weaver 1949). One could speak, I suppose, of sin as similar "static" interposing itself between God's message to us and our reception and implementation of the divine message in our lives.

Other communication research has dealt with the power of mass media in altering our consciousness and informing our choices -- the propaganda or advertising aspect of media messages (Lasswell 1927; Roloff and Miller 1980). This type of analysis is very much a part of current concerns about how media manipulate, for example encouraging us to become more active consumers, creating unrealistic perceptions of a more violent world, and imposing American culture on media audiences throughout the globe.

Other scholars have dealt with the agenda-setting role of media, especially news media (McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes 1974). Our media define what is "news" and we allow them to do it when we focus our own discussions upon the news content as it has been defined for us by media players. We all know these so-called news experts have limitations. For example, they work within an industry, a business, that defines most news stories in terms of conflict narratives. They stress the bizarre and they often do so in short sound bites rather than with in-depth analysis. And yet, their choices define what our news is and we know what is chosen by these agenda-setters by what is transmitted on radio and TV, the main source of news today for most of the world's population.

Some communication research has focused on a critique of media economic power and the problem of increasing portions of media profits being in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations (Compaine 1982). These data provoke concern in terms of economic justice, but another real issue is that media owners and players are "gatekeepers" -- with the power to define who has access to information. In an information economy, information is what we use to leverage ourselves into economic transactions. By ownership of the channels and the profits and the prices, modern media players can become a new type of feudal baron. However, modern communication technologies are trying to break up this gatekeeper monopoly. The late Ithiel de Sola Pool, in Technologies of Freedom (1983), was one of the first to note the decentralizing impact of new interactive communication technologies on policies and markets.

All of this indicates the importance of public policies in telecommunications issues such as legislation or how much our governments should regulate in the public's interest and how much the marketplace should decide. This issue of public policy relates to the duties of humanity as stewards of the gifts of creation, including scientific and technological gifts.

Another exciting thread of communication scholarship has incorporated advances in anthropology; this research focuses on communication and culture (Carey 1989). Such scholars
speak of liminality, myth, ritual, and symbol found by audiences within the stories of our cultures. Perhaps most of our stories are told today through media channels (fictional stories, news stories, advertising stories). Theologians and pastoral leaders make a big mistake when they ignore the fact that global audiences interact with these stories as they view them.

Many people who do not watch much TV themselves need to keep in mind that humanity now gathers around the TV and movie screen for the magical stories once shared by bards. People absorb information and principles of socialization from these stories, from the quest of "Star Trek" to the brash dialogue of "The Simpsons". Much of this type of research has been done on the impact and the global popularity of the early soap operas, "Dallas" (Liebes and Katz 1990).

Incidentally, although evangelical media have been analyzed (Hoover 1988), little research has been done on communication patterns within churches. It might be surprising, for some, to discover the dynamics of communication flows within the U. S. Catholic Church: who listens to whom; how various messages get transferred (and transformed) within the institutional Church; which messages are credible or meaningful in the beliefs of the faith community; and to what extent the culture, including the media, alter these messages. There could be interesting findings in such research!

Linguistic analysis has been a serious thread of communication studies, based on the philosophy of language, or semiotics. The theologian David Tracy's work (1975) has focused our attention on religious language. Dialogic anthropology proposes that humankind becomes human through communication, with varied communication patterns. Communication theory scholars have probed ramifications of the technological interconnected web of networks of which we are all a part. Everett Rogers, one of the foremost scholars of the communication studies field, has claimed that interactive, two-way technologies, represent an epistemological turning point in communication research (Rogers 1986).

We are moving from linear, point-to-point communication patterns to a web of networked interactions, where individual two-way dialogues are linked with wider groups. Thus, we move from dyads to forums as we begin to use newer technological tools to decentralize the dynamics of messages. Televised broadcasts from the streets of China and Russia have shown global audiences that with telephones and fax machines and computer terminals it is no longer possible to control communication from a centralized source. There are obvious implications for hierarchical structures and top-down communication styles.

My own research emphasis in harnessing technological tools for public service, in education, in medicine, and in servicing the basic needs of the poor, has led me to conceptualize strategies to facilitate cooperative (linking) ventures; communication technologies change rapidly and the entrepreneurial opportunities are vast. This situation requires collaborative planning and much of
my own thinking and writing has thought of this approach as *strategic alliances* by the corporate sector. Interactive strategic alliances, (ISAs), form the heart of making collaboration a social habit by institutionalizing collaborative mechanisms.

**A Communication Media Context**

One might first ask, what are the ramifications of living in a *wired or mediated* world? What, exactly, is this *information age* we speak of so glibly? What do theologians have to do with the so-called information superhighway and a five-hundred-channel world? Here are some examples of technological links that go beyond the simple exchange of movie and TV stories:

- If its present rate of growth continues, the computer network Internet will have 300 million users by 1999, 750 million by 2000, and 1.5 billion by 2001.

- As computer power increases and the size of the individual technology decreases, personal communication networks will permit wireless interconnection from units that fit in our hand or suit pocket.

- The economics and the ease of interconnection will alter our habits from independence to *inter*dependence. Our technological linkups foster attitudes that blend both a global identity and a fierce ethnic pride. One analyst commented about computer forums: "E-mail is a tribe-maker . . . at the same time it globalizes us."

- Interactive TV has the potential (in the United States) to tap into the fifteen-billion-dollar-per-year video rental market, the ten billion-dollar-per-year arcade game market, and the home retail market, which may be worth hundreds of billions of dollars every year.

- In Russia, in Somalia, in Bosnia, in South Africa, mass media and smaller interactive technologies provide a window through which global audiences gaze and actively participate. This seems to link us globally while at the same time provoking regional alliances and ethnic pride skirmishes.

How will all this impact the human family seeking God?

We probably need, as the communication scholar Rogers suggests, to re-examine much theory and practice in the light of this wired and wireless world. Some medieval faith constructs were linked to the idea of the sun revolving around the earth. As Galileo learned, when new scientific
information is put forward, it is not easy to let go of our comfortable paradigms. Change disrupts; today's rapid change disrupts exponentially and quickly.

Words and images, used metaphorically, provide central symbols of the Christian tradition. Such symbols, we have been told, give rise to thought. Theologians, of course, have already risked exploring new metaphors and updating symbols. Both liberation theory and feminist theory have pushed theologians into new arenas. Today's rapidity of change (technological, symbolic, metaphorical, communicative) challenges us to reflect and communicate about faith within changing church communities in changing cultures. This is a task which theologians and communication theorists and practitioners should address through much dialogue and joint analysis.

Changing Patterns

I have begun to reflect more systematically on the impact of modern interactive communication technologies on our individual and collective (institutional) expressions of faith. In a recent essay, I explore how communication interactivity is a metaphor for a more dialogic communio ecclesiology (Plude 1994). In that text I explore four questions:

1. What forms of participatory communication are emerging in churches and what is the role of authority in such forums?

2. How do we encourage collaboration, which the theologian Hermann Pottmeyer calls "animating forms of cooperation?"

3. Must participatory freedom lead to polarization and, in reaction, central control?

4. Can new communication and collaborative theories help Churches become vital communities, to reanimate an apparent diminution of faith in some modern societies?

In trying to answer these questions, I found supportive texts in Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Avery Dulles, Walter Kasper, Edward Schillebeeckx, Joseph Komonchak, Patrick Granfield, Bernard Häring, and others. My reflections took a systems view of Church, based somewhat on Cranfield's (1973) study. A helpful framework for analysis is used by Paul Soukup (1983), where he organizes the literature around four major theological themes: religious self-understanding, Christian attitudes toward communication, pastoral uses of communication, and ethics and advocacy. He then sets up a matrix to cross-classify the literature around the following communication analogues: linguistic, aesthetic, cultural, interpersonal, sender-receiver, and theological. These categories are reflected in the summary provided above of communication concepts in the research literature.
I will suggest three aspects of new technology interactivity and offer some potential applications for religious theory and practice. Instead of talking about using TV to evangelize, I will focus upon the changes forced upon us by interactive or two-way communication/computer tools. Such *intragroup* communication changes are of great significance to faith communities; however, this often is neglected in our concern over the impact of mass media.

One changing pattern is occurring within organizational structures. As interactive technologies become more widespread, organizations are flattened; they become more horizontal than vertical. A key organizational reason for the change is that it is no longer necessary to have everyone located in one central place because connections (as well as communication) within the organization are facilitated by computer links, fax machines, and wireless telephony, for example. Many organizations, therefore, are spreading out, decentralizing their operations, simply linking them technologically instead of organizing large numbers of people in one place.

With this distribution of organizational structure tends to come a shared responsibility and accountability. Large bureaucracies are struggling to follow corporate organizations in a major movement toward decentralization. In addition to being possible technologically, this is proving more productive in many cases. Another organizational pattern involves linking up the dispersed units. Interactive technologies foster team linkages because tasks can be facilitated by data-base management systems. The salesperson, inventory clerk, and bookkeeper can all do their piece of a customer's order because each one is operating from the same data base within the computer system. Such team linkages are almost seamless or invisible, but they are becoming a daily part of organizational patterns and relationships. Modern organizations see many groups interconnect around tasks instead of in the old departmental arrangements. These ad hoc groupings within organizational structures allow flexibility not possible in former, rigid organizational patterns.

Much of this relationship reflection makes one think of covenantal concepts in salvation history. Theology deals much with relationship and must, of course, be aware of changing relationships in humankind 's history. One theologian mentioned to me recently that he reminds his students the concept of "father" changes somewhat with modern culture. Thus, we need to seek religious language metaphors that work in our age.

The organizational patterns described above entail governance changes also. Top-down hierarchical management structures are melting into shared responsibility patterns. Members of such organizations tend to have more autonomy. Obviously, it is vital to coordinate (link) the units and this is a major challenge when organizational structures are dispersed.

It is not difficult to see the connection between these organizational patterns and theological questions such as the issue of the local Church in ecclesiology. In many organizations there is
often a tension (which can be quite creative), between the central and the local authority. As this is discussed theoretically (and under the guidance of the Spirit), it could be helpful for theologians to be aware that, on the practical level, these issues are linked to communication theories and technologies that have transformed organizational patterns in our day. A second aspect of the change instituted by two-way technological tools, relates to communication flows.

We are all linked into many networks. And our communication messages can now be stored for later use (e.g., by telephone answering machines, computers, E-mail, and fax messages). The dialogic communication flow breaks out of the tyranny of controlled one-way programmed media. It is possible the incredible popularity of the video recording is directly related to the desire latent within us to control our own programming content and our viewing timeframe.

Communication patterns within institutions are more participatory in an interactive communication technology world. Feedback (talkback) becomes a common communication mode and it is difficult to return to an authoritative top-down communication style. It is no accident small group media are a favored communication mode in small base communities of faith. These tools allow interaction and the communication loop is energized by this participatory potential. Another rich aspect of this interactive communication pattern is what one author has called *shared minds*.

Corporations using teleconferencing usually cite the savings possible because people do not have to travel to get to meetings; they can be linked into a meeting technologically (by telephone, computer, or video). However, the larger payoff may well be that ideas are born from the process of collective input that the format of a forum permits. There is an accumulation, a piling up, of thinking when one is part of an interactive group.

I cannot help but think of the work of John Henry Newman or Yves Congar when reflecting upon a participatory theology, as the Church struggles to move toward more inclusive roles for laity, for women, for national cultures. One is also reminded of our obligation to give the poor a voice and options that are more meaningful than violence. We are seeing participation in the political arena (U.S. talk shows and faxes fueling uprisings in China and Russia, along with cell phone messaging). Our communities of faith, too, are interactive liturgically and sacramentally and personally; a technological world can serve these faith communities.

One must also consider the concept of technology as *power*. Information technologies like the telephone have long been considered a necessity in developed nations, although there are surprisingly large blocks of people even in the United States without telephone access. A farmer in a remote village in India is disadvantaged economically if he does not know current prices at a regional market and he is unable to sell his crops at the right time. Even access to a village phone transforms economic realities for him and his family if it allows him to monitor market prices some distance away. In fact, the growing use of *wireless* technologies will allow such nations to
"leapfrog" over previous wired technologies. Access to information technology is a power issue, an economic issue, a justice issue. Interactive technologies offer the chance to transform the concept of power over to power with. A gospel response to new technologies is to safeguard access for all God's children rather than reserve most of the goods for a favored few.

I would recommend, along with many other connections, some interaction between a theology of spirituality and those who become victims of new technological tools. Who among us does not regret that information technologies move information faster and faster, increasing the pace of our lives? As one who struggles to be contemplative, I find I must occasionally pull the plug! Communication technologies can inform the theological enterprise, but how very much the interactive world needs to be reminded of Thomas Merton's comment in his Asian Journal: "the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, beyond speech, beyond concept".
The Challenge Of Change In The Catholic Church

By Frances Forde Plude

[This paper was presented at the Women’s Seminar in Constructive Theology at the Catholic Theological Society of America, San Jose, California, June 8, 2000. It is designed to aid theologians seeking to adapt the study of theology to a mediated culture which transmits change rapidly. The paper discusses the change process and its challenge for organizations – including religious communities.]

Change as a Constant

Why does everything keep changing? How do we know whether a specific change is good or bad? And how do we cope with the rapid pace of change today? Seeking answers to the above questions, we should first reflect upon a different question: How does the process of change occur? This question leads to other process questions. How do new ideas (or habits, or products) become adopted? Who provides leadership in the process? How are the consequences evaluated?

The term “adoption” has parallels in both religious studies and communication studies. In theology the term used is “reception.” The theologian Richard Gaillardetz, in Teaching with Authority, notes: “God’s word for a particular community fully emerges within the community only as the fruit of a lively conversation between the questions, concerns, and preoccupations of a particular community...” (p 241). Communication scholars in the field of reception studies analyze how audiences do meaning making as they view and internalize video content and other varieties of popular culture.

Trying to understand change can be disturbing in the context of religious belief. We hope for eternal truths as a foundation for our world view and our individual and group relationships. When we experience shifts, especially radical shifts, in ideas or practices we’ve long held dear, then what happens to this foundational system? How do we reconstruct some solidity in our daily life and in our future hopes?

As an experienced communication specialist, and as someone who consults regularly with Catholic Church leadership, I have often analyzed how communication messages flow within church structures. These communication and cultural change dynamics occur and interact within and between local, national, and international church settings. Today’s global context involves rapid change of ideas, structures, and technologies, along with the challenge of radical diversity of cultures, ethnic enclaves, even local theologies. I propose here that we desperately need an understanding of how the change process works to manage change and diversity effectively. This
essay offers background and case studies to help us manage change in the 21st century – in a digital global culture.

After studies at Boston College, and graduate study in theology, my life as a television producer led me to doctoral studies at Harvard University and MIT – to study the impact of new communication technologies and networks on organizational structures and on public policy. For two decades I have served as a college professor at several universities and have served as a consultant to U.S. government agencies, including the U.S. Congress. I have worked with the leadership of various religious denominations as these church members, including the U.S. Catholic bishops, have grappled with communication technology changes. I am a member of a small international think tank that meets with communication scholars and practitioners in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

I would probably be considered a “change agent” – an individual who is comfortable exploring new ideas and methods. However, I am also grounded in tradition and have solid respect for appropriate authority and leadership. My comments offer perspectives, rather than final answers. This material draws upon my own years of research and experience in media and in other areas of communication research and practice, such as linguistics, persuasion, organizational and interpersonal communication. These ideas also build upon social science research dealing with the change process.

How Innovations Get Diffused

The communication scholar Everett Rogers has written the definitive compilation of this research and his book is entitled Diffusion of Innovations (4th edition, 1995). Most of the principles about innovation diffusion in this text are explored fully in the Rogers work and I draw from it freely. However, before moving to the concept of change, it is important to reflect further on the matter of process. (Much of this essay probes the change process, rather than exclusively proclaiming what should be changed.)

A current analyst of change and its dynamics is Michael Hammer; he calls it “reengineering.” Hammer’s books and workshops are transforming the way organizations, including corporations, view their structures and tasks. This is what “change management” is all about. In fact, Hammer says, we must focus on process instead of task to be purposeful, deliberate, and amenable to good management in organizations. His point is that any organization is fractured and cumbersome when individuals focus only on their own little piece of work (task). Clients are sent from one department to another for solutions because no one understands the whole picture; people do not see or “own” the total process.
Hammer points to huge corporations (Sears, IBM, and General Motors) that became clumsy dinosaurs, unable to change because they were broken up into thousands of individual tasks or departments. In a global economy, widely varied and competitive, groups must view their organizations and outputs holistically – with the wider process perspective involving individuals from many areas working together in a seamless manner.

In his book *Beyond Reengineering* Hammer offers specific details for a process-centered organization: how personnel are restructured; how leadership is redefined; how communication systems must be redesigned; how incentives work. Hammer says we are often ineffective because “… our people are performing tasks that need not be done at all to achieve the desired result and because we encounter agonizing delays in getting the work from the person who does one task to the person who does the next one.” (p. 5) He adds: “… our problems lie not in the performance of individual tasks and activities, the units of work, but in the processes, how the units fit together into a whole” (p 6). So, first, in dealing with the challenge of change, we must view it as a process – to be dealt with and managed from the process perspective. Our management of change is, thus, basically grounded because we are viewing the horizon instead of simply individual particulars inside the change landscape.

I want to insert here that I see these processes and changes within the Catholic Church taking place in a graced environment with the world and various communities of humanity guided by the Wisdom of God. However, grace builds on nature; our stewardship requires that we utilize our own gifts in enlightened and collaborative ways to build the concepts, structures and processes that foster responsible change.

I should also note that when we reflect upon institutional change we are sometimes speaking about religious groups as organizational structures. This may be quite different from, though related to, viewing church as communities of faith-filled people.

**The Inner Dynamics of the Change Process**

To begin at the beginning, we need to look at the Rogers definition of diffusion of innovation and examine some of the components of that process. We can then proceed to some generalizations emerging from the research in this field. It will be helpful, also, to review the impact of two different factors on the continuum of change: organizational structures and communication networks.

I will, finally, offer recommendations and suggest strategies for understanding the change process as it relates to the Catholic Church. My own knowledge and experience in communication studies is of value here since information-exchange, a communication dynamic, is an essential part of the change process.
Note that I am not dealing with the _content_ of any specific change. I am not suggesting what should or should not be changed. I am, instead, urging that awareness of the change process can be beneficial for church leaders and followers as we all deal with the realities (and the cultural diversities) of change dynamics.

Rogers defines _process research_ as “data gathered and analyzed that seeks to determine the time-ordered sequence of a set of events” (p 192). As of 1995, the date of Rogers’ latest compilation, there were about 4,000 innovation diffusion research studies, done over a period of 40 years. Rogers notes that almost no other field of behavioral science research represents more effort by more scholars in more diversified fields of knowledge.

**The Value and Limitations of Diffusion Research**

Why has so much work been done on the question of how innovations are diffused? First, there are very practical payoffs when we learn how the change process works. Secondly, the pace of change in the modern or postmodern world is increasing rapidly and we are battered by the need to understand and manage this change. Thirdly, this is a concept that can be applied in many different fields – medicine, marketing, sociology, and psychology. These applications offer a solid pragmatic appeal inviting wide support for the research.

Another factor is that innovation diffusion research has played a significant role as developing nations have struggled to introduce modern ideas in order to “grow” themselves economically and in other areas such as health and social programs.

This research has explored many aspects of change. Some examples:

- How do the opinions of leaders affect the rate of change?
- Who interacts with whom in the change process?
- What kinds of communication channels are most effective?
- What are the consequences of innovations?
- How does the change process differ in varied cultural settings?

There are some problems in this research. There has tended to be a pro-innovation bias in most studies, an over-dependence on a new idea “fix.” In addition, often the research interviews take place after the diffusion process has been completed and there may be problems with the accuracy of the memories; there is a need for more “photographs” of the diffusion process while it is underway. And there is some instability in the research; similar studies sometimes come up with varied results.
Occasionally prestige associated with a new idea propels the innovation, rather than a real need for change. Continual software upgrades in the computer world may reflect this. A firm’s marketing skills and profit motives may even push for unnecessary change. However, change can also be propelled by the simple desire of consumers to appear innovative. There is a deeper issue also. It is easier to pinpoint change among individuals rather than to diagnose underlying dynamics within systems. Rogers asks: “Why do we study the poor rather than the non-poor to understand the origins of poverty” (p 109)?

How Change Occurs

How does the change process work? As early as 1903, a French judge, Gabriel Tarde, noted about change: “(There is) a slow advance in the beginning, followed by rapid and uniformly accelerated progress, followed again by progress that continues to slacken until it finally stops.” Analysts call this the S-shaped diffusion curve: a paradigm shift.

That’s how change looks from the outside. Inside, the process has some defined steps.

1. The **knowledge phase**: people seek information and process it
2. **Attitude formation**: this is a “feeling” stage
3. The **decision stage**: individuals decide to adopt or not
4. **Implementation**: the innovation moves forward; and
5. **Confirmation**: the decision may (or may not) be continued.

Often re-invention occurs; an innovation may be changed, especially when it is introduced into a new setting. In educational institutions, for example, there may be local pride of ownership so educators will adapt an innovation in some way, sort of “tweaking” it so it looks like they have tailored the innovation to their own local setting and needs.

Personnel in the Change Process

There are identifiable roles within the change process. The key player is known as the change agent. Among the most effective change agents have been agricultural county extension agents – individuals associated with land grant colleges who promote innovative ideas among U.S. farmers.

How does the change agent role work? These individuals often develop and promote the need or the desire for change. They establish an information-exchange relationship between the resource system (the Agriculture Department) and the client (individual farmers). The change agent diagnoses problems, creates the intent to change in clients, and helps translate that intention into action. The change agent often stabilizes the adoption process and thus helps the client to keep
renewing the change decision. At this point the clients become their own change agents. Feedback from the client is critical so the change agent often has a foot in both worlds, that of the resource system and the client. Sometimes the change agent needs to prevent too much adoption when individuals or institutions want to continually absorb new ideas that are not prudent.

Another player in the change process is the opinion leader. Rogers notes: “Opinion leadership is the degree to which an individual is able to influence informally other individuals’ attitudes or overt behavior in a desired way with relative frequency.” Obviously change agents are successful to the extent they work with opinion leaders who often are not innovative themselves. In fact, opinion leaders cannot be too innovative, or they are too far out in front of their followers. In this way they can lose their ability to influence opinion.

Another key role in the change process is the early adopter – for example, a farmer who incorporates a new idea and this acceptance by one individual moves his peers to adopt the change.

To summarize, some of the things we know about the change process. Change agents promote innovation by working with opinion leaders. The adoption starts out slowly (with early adopters) then the pace of change accelerates until it levels off (the S-shaped curve). The process has identifiable stages: obtaining information, forming attitudes, making decisions, implementation, and confirming or rejecting the continued adoption of the change.

Generalizations from Innovation Diffusion Research

The communication scholar Everett Rogers has surveyed innovation diffusion for more than forty years. Various editions of his classic work Diffusion of Innovations clarify the change process by enunciating some generalizations (translatable principles) emerging from thousands of research projects conducted in many different countries. Some of these principles can help organizations (including religious groups) to cope with the change process and to manage it wisely.

Some principles have already been cited, for example, the understandable relationship between successful change agents and opinion leaders. And many of the principles seem like simple common sense. However, it is good to keep in mind that these principles or generalizations are not just “hunches”; they are tested repeatedly in the field by scholars in varied settings. Thus, they are reliable guidelines for organizational planners who are trying to manage innovation creatively but with prudential judgment.
Rogers quotes several researchers: “A technological innovation is like a river – its growth and development depending on its tributaries and on the condition it encounters on its way” (p 146).

There are numerous generalizations in the Rogers book so anyone can examine the nooks and crannies of innovation there. I have selected some here that seem to me to be most significant from several perspectives:

1. principles about the *process* itself and about *context* issues
2. generalizations about the *people* who manage change
3. principles that relate to *organizational structures*; and
4. research conclusions about *communication channels and processes*

**Process and Context Principles**

One strategic element, research shows, is to have “pre-diffusion activities” – to systematically ascertain whether there is truly a need for change. As mentioned above, there may be a bias toward change even when it is not desirable. This innovation-development process must, however, be an open one instead of closing option for a change that is appropriate.

The socioeconomic context is a serious consideration. Many studies show that change agents spend most of their time with early adopters and this group tends to be better educated and have more resources. Thus, often change benefits those who are already advantaged. Of course, innovativeness is a continuous variable; we speak of early adopters and we break up the process only as a conceptual device.

The broad context of this research is human behavior itself. Behavioral change is often motivated by dissonance that is uncomfortable; the individual or group seeks to reduce or eliminate the disequilibrium caused by some types of change. There is a social landscape present also; social factors interact with the change process. Many change processes involve social marketing; the push to encourage individuals to stop smoking would be a good example of this kind of innovation.

An important context issue is the concept of “critical mass.” This is the point in any process when the process itself becomes self-sustaining after some threshold point has been reached. As Rogers notes: “Until there is a critical mass of adopters, an innovation has little advantage (and considerable disadvantage) for individual adopters” (p 319).
Characteristics of Change Personnel

Understandably, one of the most important traits for change leadership is *credibility*. Neighbors, for example, are considered more reliable than sales representatives in promoting change. Innovators tend to have consistent characteristics in most research studies. They often hold positions of relative advantage socially. They tend to adopt changes that are compatible with their existing values and beliefs. If the innovation is complex or difficult to understand it tends not to get adopted. Innovators like to be able to try out a product first; hence many medicine samples are left in doctors’ offices.

An interesting item emerges in innovation studies in developing nations. In these settings, paraprofessional aides are often used as change agents quite successfully. Here it is almost an advantage that their formal training is quite limited. A classic example is the case of “barefoot doctors” in China. By 1980 there were 1.8 million of them – one for every 400 people in rural areas. Most of these doctors did, in fact, wear shoes but the name emphasized the fact that “these individuals were peasants who often worked barefoot in the rice fields” (p 326). The “doctors” handled routine health matters in a village and could refer individuals to commune hospitals. However, very few found this necessary. Candidates were chosen by their peers in the village and had excellent credibility despite their limited training.

Certain characteristics of typical early adopters emerge from the literature. They tend to enjoy more social participation than others. They do have more change-agent contact and often seek information and have greater knowledge about innovations. They tend to be less fatalistic, have higher aspirations and higher levels of achievement motivation. They come in all ages, and they have more education, generally. They often have a more favorable attitude toward assuming risk, they are generally empathetic, they are not dogmatic, and they usually have a greater ability to deal with abstractions.

Organizational Dynamics in the Change Process

There is quite a difference between encouraging one individual to adopt innovation and the task of promoting change within an organization or an institution, even when that larger unit is a small village in Korea! In some cases, a decision to change is made by only one individual. Or choosing to adopt might be a consensus decision within a group. Sometimes “choices to adopt or reject an innovation (may be) made in a system by relatively few individuals who possess power, status, or technical expertise” (p 372).

It may surprise some to learn that, in general, larger organizations are more innovative than smaller ones. These units usually have more resources and technical expertise, but it is also true that size is one variable researchers can measure precisely.
There is another organizational factor that is interesting to look at for some generalized principles: centralization or decentralization. (This also relates to the concept of hierarchy or networked organizations discussed in the communications section below.) The early success of agricultural extension agents with U.S. farmers led to an overemphasis on centralized models of innovation diffusion. This contrasts with wide sharing of power and control among the members of a decision system. In this latter type “innovations can originate from numerous sources and evolve as they diffuse via horizontal networks,” according to Donald Shön, an organizational specialist (p 334). Many corporations, faced with global competition, note it is more effective for innovations to bubble up from operational levels in a system and then spread through peer groups within the organization. This dynamic may lead to participants creating and sharing information to reach mutual understanding.

There can, of course, be “quality control” issues as new ideas move through any group. How does an organization (like a church with established tradition and teaching) maintain its integrity? One dynamic is called “gatekeeping” – defined by Rogers as “the communication behavior of an individual or individuals who withhold or reshape information … (under their control) as it flows into their system.” (Most of us have experienced this kind of tight management control in institutions). Another technique used is the “consensus development conference” where individuals systematically highlight potential innovations through an open reporting system. Innovation diffusion literature is strewn with examples of proposed changes that have unforeseen consequences. Generally, these “great ideas” are abandoned or are re-invented to comply with needs in acceptable ways.

How Networking Fosters Change

In the early days of communication research it was thought that marketing through mass media was the most effective way to persuade groups and individuals to change. It turns out that this is an efficient way to get information out; however, researchers began to speak of a “two-step flow” model. Interpersonal communication (the second step) is the best way to effectively persuade individuals to adopt change. People learn of an innovation or a new idea through the media; it is then reinforced when neighbors speak about it. In this process, two-way communication helps people secure clarification about a new idea and it also assess more accurately the credibility of the source. Thus, the way to maximize the adoption of new ideas is to use mass media, use small-group communication, and then especially focus on two-way personal communication networks to solidify the decision to change.

In today’s networked and multimedia world, this is the communication infrastructure reality and leaders have no choice but to function within it. I often tell hierarchical leaders: “You can keep on trying to control communication, sending top-down commands, but the message flows cannot
be controlled in E-mail and telephone environments, and on social media, so you need to understand the network reality and utilize it effectively.”

Rogers reminds us: “Most psychological approaches to human learning look within the individual to understand how learning occurs. But the social learning approach looks outside of the individual at a specific type of information exchange with others to explain how behavior changes… an individual learns from another by observational modeling… one observes another person’s behavior, and then does something similar” (p 330). Rogers adds: “A communication network consists of interconnected individuals who are linked by patterned flows of information. An individual’s network links are important determinants of his or her adoption of innovations” (p 332).

I have written elsewhere (in The Church and Communication, edited by Patrick Granfield), that I see communication interactivity as a model for more dialogic institutions (including religious institutions). In the same volume the noted theologian Hermann Pottmeyer says: “The word ‘dialogue’ as a description of communication within the (Roman Catholic) Church is new. It is not found in pre-conciliar ecclesiology whose key words were ‘jurisdiction’ and ‘obedience’” (See The Church and Communication, Sheed and Ward).

Dr. Lynn Andrea Stein at M.I.T. reminds us of another factor: “… don’t think of computation as just calculation. Think of computation as a community” (Harvard University Gazette, May 28, 1998). So, this is a “brave new world” and institutions (and change agents) need to adapt to networks!

One book addressing these issues very creatively is The Age of the Network, by Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamp. These authors speak of moving “from the pyramid to the pizza.” In other words, the new organizational chart is not a strict hierarchy; it is a circle with small circles within it – each one a team with some connecting links. This new cross-sectional networked organization approach enables hierarchy, bureaucracy, and network to fit together organizationally. They say simply: “The difference, of course, comes in the use of links. Vertical, one-way connections constrict information flow, while two-way hub and spoke communications provide control and coordination opportunities. To convert a wheel to a network, just add links…”

These authors note that when humanity was nomadic, small-group organization sufficed. An agricultural culture required hierarchy, but small groups continued to function. The industrial-age culture and economy discovered the value of bureaucracy. This was added to organizational patterns, along with the small groups and hierarchy. (A new organizational structure tends to be added to previous forms; it does not replace them).
Thus, experts identify the current importance of networks to organizations, facilitated by new technological communication links. However, small groups, hierarchy, and bureaucracy still play a role. They speak of “turning hierarchy on its side” in the age of the network – using the values of hierarchy while adapting its previous form to include network nodes.

When we review innovation diffusion research, what generalizations can we make about the role of networks in facilitating change?

One hundred percent of the research studies support one principle: “In all cases… social systems whose members are more closely linked by communication networks have a stronger diffusion effect and a faster rate of adoption of innovation” (pp 235-236). Two other factors emerge. First, the degree of interconnectedness is positively related to the adoption of innovations, the more networking, the more change. Secondly, the literature shows some “over-adoption” – many people seem to have a penchant for anything that is new. Therefore, what organizations (including religious organizations) can expect in today’s networked environment is more and more change and it will occur at a faster pace. Somehow, if wisdom is to prevail, change agents and opinion leaders need, themselves, to adapt to this reality.

Especially for churches, we need to recall that adoption of change is also a reality in the matter of theological reception, as Richard Gaillardetz notes above. Gaillardetz is himself conceptualizing a new model of reception that systematically inserts interactivity into it. (Address given to the 1999 Communication Theology seminar at the Catholic Theological Association of America).

Change “As if People Mattered”

As we have examined the components of the change process, it all seems efficient and relatively predictable. However, there are difficulties. I will now examine some of these problems and in the next section I introduce the subject of how change challenges today’s institutional religions. In other writings I examine specific arenas of change within the Roman Catholic Church and within theology specifically.

Keeping Change Humane

Economics plays a central role in shaping the activities of the modern world. So, it is probably appropriate to begin thinking about the challenge of change with some insights by the British economist E. F. Schumacher, author of the powerful book Small Is Beautiful, originally published in London in 1973. The book’s Introduction refers to a report by the editors of The Journal of the Fourth World. They speak of how “the pace of change (needs to be) regulated not by the appetites of a mighty minority for profit and power, but by the day-to-day needs of small-
scale human communities and the psychic capacities of their members to adapt” (p x, Harper & Row, 1989 edition).

One of Schumacher’s major concerns is that modern economics “considers consumption to be the sole end and purpose of all economic activity, taking the factors of production – land, labor, and capital – as the means” (p 61). This will, of course, drive innovation and change. Schumacher, however, refers us back to *I Ching, The Book of Changes*, reputed to be mankind’s oldest book. “The *I Ching* is based on the conviction that, while everything changes all the time, change itself is unchanging and conforms to certain ascertainable metaphysical laws” (p 237). He notes Greeks consulted oracles, but the Chinese “went to a book setting out the universal and necessary pattern of changes, the very Laws of Heaven to which all nature conforms….“ He adds, perhaps ruefully, “Modern man goes to the computer.”

One chapter in Schumacher’s book is entitled “Technology with a Human Face.” Here he urges us to be aware of “people of the forward stampede.” He says we need to determine what changes really constitute progress, suggesting that to leave this to experts is to side with “the people of the forward stampede.” He urges, instead, “technology with a human face,” noting: “Man is small, and, therefore, small is beautiful.”

Bill Joy, cofounder of the U.S. computer firm Sun Microsystems, wrote a challenging paper in *Wired* magazine (April, 2000), questioning whether change is propelling us to a future that will replace existing humans through 21st-century technologies – robotics, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, (add artificial intelligence, or AI. Joy worries:

The systems involved are complex, involving interaction among, and feedback between, many parts. Any changes to such a system will cascade in ways that are difficult to predict… (p 239).

The problematic “change agent” here is “a dangerous amplifying factor: They can self-replicate” (p 240). We already have experience of this from the damage caused when a computer virus is unleashed globally Joy warns: “Perhaps it is always hard to see the bigger impact while you are in the vortex of a change. Failing to understand the consequences of our inventions while we are in the rapture of discovery and innovation seems to be a common fault of scientists and technologists…” (p 243).

Joy comments: The only realistic alternative I see is *relinquishment*: to limit development of the technologies that are too dangerous, by limiting our pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge (p 254).
He adds: “If we could agree, as a species, what we wanted, where we were headed, and why, then we would make our future much less dangerous – then we might understand what we can and should relinquish” (p 256).

Joy’s suggestion that we do “more thinking up front” reminds us of Schumacher’s advice that the “experts” – “the people of the forward stampede” – are not always the best decision-makers. Many of the change projects studied by Rogers are of the “top-down” variety. Perhaps we need to have more input from the grassroots to preserve “the human face” of change.

We do not have to deal with future technologies to see the harm of some technological change. Eli Noam, a Columbia University Professor of Business/Telecommunications, explored the difficulties in a 1999 paper entitled “Why the Internet Will Be Bad for Democracy.” He refers to the technology hype that purrs about the democratizing effect of the Internet. Noam notes that, like electricity, Internet connectivity will be almost universal and “the Internet will (be) liberated from the terror of the (personal computer) as its gateway.” In his opinion, “the PC is the most consumer-unfriendly consumer product built since the unicycle” (p 4).

Noam lists (and goes on to explain), various reasons why the Internet will not be good for democracy:

- It will make politics more expensive, raising entry barriers
- It will make reasoned, informed political dialogue difficult
- It disconnects as much as it connects
- It does not necessarily weaken state control
- It facilitates international manipulation of local politics
- Electronic voting does not strengthen democracy
- Direct access to public officials will be phony.

Noam concludes:

“The Internet is a thrilling tool. Its possibilities are enchanting, intoxicating, enriching. But liberating? We cannot see problems clearly if we keep on those rosy virtual glasses and think that by expressing everything in 1 and 0, and bundling them in packets, we are even an analog inch closer to better political systems” (p 16).
New World Views for Religious Institutions

We now come to the problem of how the change process impacts organizations, especially religious organizations, as they attempt to preserve traditions and teachings in an age of constant change.

Two recent books have helped me understand the deep cultural and communication changes we must cope with in the 21st century. I will examine these insights first and then list some areas for practical consideration by leaders and church membership-at-large – all of us battered by constant change.

A Stanford University law professor, Lawrence Friedman, has written a thoughtful book entitled *The Horizontal Society* (Yale University Press, 1999). This work is especially significant for church leaders since they have tended to lead their institutions through hierarchical (or vertical) structures.

Friedman argues that modernization (especially communication and travel innovations) have uprooted large masses of people, making us more mobile. This has weakened and dispersed small communities (families and villages) and humans have begun to seek new groups for their moorings. These tend to be homogeneous horizontal groups – feminists, the handicapped, gays, Cancer victims, ethnic enclaves – and people can be interconnected technologically, even anonymously. Lacking the stability of earlier communities, some people become fiercely loyal to these newer horizontal groups; ethnic cleansing can be a frightening example.

Friedman argues that personal identity matters today in new and different ways. Church leaders probably need to listen to this author as he notes that “…we have to work with the world we have, not with the world we would like to have or used to have.” He adds: “We – all of us – live in a world that was never here before. It is a world of mass transport and mass communication, a world of satellite TV, (the Internet), and a world of computers…” (p ix).

Friedman argues:

Modernization is above all a process of connection; a process of linking the small, molecular units of human life into larger ones. But as the linkage goes on, the glue between the atoms and molecules becomes weaker. … When isolation is destroyed, the social units – the molecules that make up human life – tend to rearrange themselves and create what we are calling a horizontal society. People form or are aggregated into new groups (p 9).
A key characteristic of this new human arrangement is that many people now choose what group they want to join. Today there is even more choice involved in religious affiliation (or lack of it); one recent book on this subject is entitled *Shopping for Faith*, comparing this process to purchasing a commodity. Thus, institutional religion, with its vertical authority structure, is called upon to serve a society that has widespread individualism within it. And these individuals are linked horizontally in new groups, including online groups, they choose to join and leave at will.

These changes can be overstated, of course. Vertical structures continue to exist, along with horizontal groups, but there can be no doubt this change is widespread and it is a challenge to religious institutions.

A second major insight for me has been the work of the Latin-American communication scholar Jesús Martín Barbero in his book *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations* (Sage, 1993). Martín-Barbero disagrees with recent communication research scholars who have focused on the power of media to manipulate (or change) the masses. While this does occur, he argues that Latin America media have mediated the process of cultural transformation in popular culture – that the masses have used media in their own way to reconcile class and social differences. Forums for this mediation or transformation have included serial novels, local radio, circuses, fiestas, carnivals, music, film, and television melodramas (*telenovelas*). Martín-Barbero reminds us:

> The family and the school, the old realms of ideological formation are no longer the places of socialization. The mentors of behavior are films, television, and advertising (p 34). … Now the masses, with the help of technology, feel nearer to even the most remote and sacred things. Their perception carries a demand for equality that is the basic energy of the masses (p 48).

Martín-Barbero’s work is a part of recent communication scholarship that has integrated cultural studies into the analysis of communication processes and practices. Another significant development has been an increased study of the audience *reception* process, (mentioned above and related to *theological reception*. As Martín-Barbero asks: “What do people *do* with what they believe, with what they buy, with what they see?”

**When the Holy Spirit Is the Change Agent**

Here I explore the issue of change within the Roman Catholic Church changes we have experienced as Catholics. Our lives have been transformed by these changes. Some have worked hard to effect change. Some long for even more change. Here I have tried to help church members adapt to change. We each bring different backgrounds and gifts to the discussion. In
this I am speaking in my own voice and here I conclude with some observations and specific recommendations about the change process as I have studied it. I speak as one who has done graduate work, and much study, in theology, and as a communication specialist.

First, I believe the new understanding of this millennium’s religion, communication and culture needs to be articulated theologically. I have worked for almost a decade to encourage the development of a new body of thought called “Communication Theology.” We are beginning to see a body of literature in this area. In addition to many international colleagues, I know, personally, almost thirty theology doctoral students (from numerous countries) who are trying to integrate communication studies into their studies and writings.

Like the fields of Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology, there is a need to integrate communication studies into theology. There is a very respectable body of research and practice in persuasion, image studies, symbol, linguistics, mass media, critical and cultural studies, audience reception, etc. The impact of the mass media and the newly emerging role of computer networks represent only a small portion of the total field of communication studies. All these systematic insights available about communication and culture ought to transform the way we do theology in the 21st century.

One excellent example of this kind of theological reflection is a work by Richard Gaillardetz entitled Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture (Crossroad, 1999). Gaillardetz reflects upon how technology has permeated his own family life and turns to the thought of Robert Borgmann for insight. Borgmann explains the technological device has become a pervasive part of our culture and its invisibility often robs us of practices allowing us to “engage the larger world in our daily lives” (p 23).

Gaillardetz then goes on to explore, theologically, “Christian resources within our tradition that support the call to preserve vital focal things and practices in our daily life” (p 46). Among these resources are a life of grace, communal spirituality, and liturgy, or Christian worship. Gaillardetz asks: “How can we not view human innovation evident in technology as an expression of imagination and intellect that are themselves marks of the divine image within us?” This volume is a thoughtful and prayerful exploration of the theological context of today’s culture of technology.

I don’t believe church leadership and theologians will truly take communication or mass culture seriously, or know what to do about them, until all this becomes articulated theologically. There is a wide culture gap here because the masses do take communication, especially mass and social media seriously and they do mediate their social/religious space through media. The Super Bowl ritual, or the pain of seeing "Superman” paralyzed, or the Princess Di funeral, are all ritual and celebrity examples of modern mass mediation.
Secondly, since the Second Vatican Council transformed our theology of the church in the modern world, the Spirit of God is calling upon the people of God to witness the Gospel message within this modern, mediated world. Sometime this requires critique. More often, however, it probably calls for us to do our homework – to study the dynamics of change within a mediated global culture, to value the effectiveness of new tools (including technology), to learn the language of the mediated culture, and to minister to those who are alienated within it. We can incorporate the visual culture into our worship more creatively. We can encourage and support value-oriented creativity in all art forms. And we can simply be deeply reflective about it and share these reflections widely.

Another example of this homework is the adaptation occurring in the field of missiology. Based on anthropology findings, the church’s evangelization efforts have been transformed, giving much more respect to local cultures. The theologian Robert Schreiter speaks of “local theologies” and a “new catholicity” in his writings that are heavily informed by communication and cultural studies principles.

Thirdly, along with theology and communication/cultural awareness, all churches will simply need to improve their own communication skills and priorities. In his study of democracy on the Internet mentioned above, Eli Noam notes that the Internet, with its fancy video and multimedia messages and information resources, will increase audience expectations. And he asks: “When everyone can speak, who will be listened to?” He replies it will probably not be the wisest or those with the most compelling case or cause, but the best produced, and whatever is promoted best.

Organized religion, with its gifts of Wisdom, will have to study this communication / cultural / artistic competition and develop ways to reach the hearts and minds of humanity – through words, visual and audio media, through actions (witness), and through interpersonal/interactive communication. This will require listening as well as proclaiming. Jesus was not “slick” but he was an extraordinary communicator and His message informs and transforms even our postmodern technological culture.

Finally (although many other ideas could be mentioned), the 21st century will present an unparalleled opportunity for ethical guidance as our cultural and technological and economic changes propel us toward incredible (and, perhaps, dangerous) new frontiers. We need the wisdom of Bill Joy and Eli Noam and Lawrence Friedman and Jesús Martín-Barbero, and many others, as we attempt to discover ethical guideposts in concert with ecumenical and educational and cultural and theological experts.
This text is one attempt to reflect on change and to offer, not answers, but, instead, some guidance.
Beyond The Gutenberg Hologram: The Gamble Of A Lifetime

By David C. Robinson, S.J.

[Robinson gave the Plenary Address at the CTSA convention. The text is from the CTSA Proceedings 57 (2002), pp 63-79. Note: The response by Mary Ann Hinsdale is integrated into the text below in italics.]

Prefatory Note

When first contacted regarding the possibility of presenting to the 2002 CTSA convention on the topic of new technologies and their impact upon theological reflection in the twenty-first century, I recognized that Reading the Signs of the Times meant moving outside the linear boundaries of the traditional plenary paper. Indeed, the presentation process needed to mirror various elements and issues that information technologies raise for academic discourse, and for intellectual reflection in general. As a result, the plenary, while respecting the limits of time and geography imposed by the conference structure, nevertheless attempted to provide an informational/experiential glimpse into the complexities of communication in a cyber age.

As a means of decentering traditional expectations, I commenced the presentation by descending from the "hegemonic platform" and the "empyrean" podium, to address the gathering directly. Although this might have been read as a social gesture (which it certainly was!), a more significant intention was the attempt to establish a direct informational/communication link to those receiving my words and ideas, a link less disrupted by the conventional symbols of institutional power and academic "authority". The session opened with a multimedia activity, including a brief, historical text on the life of St. Ignatius of Loyola; a computer-generated slide show that included historical, geographical, and artistic images from his life and era; and a musical selection on CD ROM.

This simple demonstration was intended to model the intricate layers of information that can be presented all at once in a digital environment, and readily duplicated around the world with the internet transfer of a few computer files. Our introductory glimpse at the life of Ignatius could have been covered in text form only, in the same length of time, with a few telling phrases and metaphors. However, the selective use of images helped trigger a multitude of additional responses relative to our sense of domestic geography, life crises, spiritual transformation, classical history, hagiography, iconography, architecture, Baroque art, etc. The additional layering of a well-known piece of classical music added to the potential complexity of the knowledge or data we brought to assimilating the experience. Given the context of an academic conference, the obvious question might be, "Why do this?" We had all seen media presentations before. However, the intention was to provide an experiential frame for understanding the
intricacy of information processing that is endemic to the world of computer technology. Our interaction was based on discoveries derived from two modern fields of inquiry—complex systems theory, and cybernetic feedback loops.

Systems science operates on the presupposition that no matter how complex the world we experience, we can always discover intrinsic types of organization within it, and those organizational types are independent of the immediate field or domain we are examining. Moreover, this systems approach emphasizes points of interaction and connection, rather than those of distinction and separation. Of most interest to information theorists are those systems that are adaptive and self-regulating, capable of evolutionary development within their various environments. A human mind, a society, or an environmental ecology are indicative of such developmental systems. Within these systems are processes of self-regulation and adaptability that are established and maintained by cybernetic loops—complex feedback mechanisms that inform the system of its current state and its future possibilities. There are two basic feedback loops: positive and negative. Contrary to our immediate intuition, these are not systems equivalents of good and bad, or affirmative and critical input. A positive feedback loop consists of information that reinforces the present state, producing "more of the same" within the system.

If allowed to go to extremes, a breakdown can occur—cancer is a case in point. A negative feedback loop offers information that is not simply consistent with what is and promotes an adaptation in systems behavior. A basic thermostat and heater provide a case in point. Each, in its operations, delivers information to the other, thus promoting balance (i.e., a stable heating level) within the system.

The issue that confronted us in the CTSA plenary "experiment" was the extent to which our theological endeavors are proliferating a pattern based on a positive feedback loop from previous generations of researchers and theorists, and the manner in which contemporary information and media technologies are initiating a negative feedback loop that will require adaptation and evolution in our own self-understanding and methodological development. To some, the language of systems and cybernetics might have seemed like an elaborate screen, simply inviting disciplinary revision or interdisciplinary cooperation. However, the intention was to initiate a new context for conversations, one that would enable us to unpack the more profound potentials that information technology has brought to our field of perceptions.

To mirror the manner cybernetic feedback allows for internal adjustment of an information system, the presentation was divided into a prelude and five "information vignettes". After each, Mary Ann Hinsdale and I engaged in a dialogue of clarification. The purpose was to allow as much course correction or conceptual evolution to occur within the context of a single information transfer that we had conveniently labeled a plenary address. In addition, the reading
of the text was supplemented by a PowerPoint presentation, to provide a visual map of the verbal/conceptual flow that the printed page represented.

Prelude

Interviewed during the *Jesuit Education 21* conference held at St. Joseph's University in late June 1999, Joseph O'Hare, S.J., offered his reflections on the future of Jesuit education. Commenting on the possibilities for the continuance of a venerable learning tradition, he noted: "I am full of hope about the future. I do not offer any guarantees, and I cannot tell you what the odds are, but I think I it's worth the gamble of a lifetime". As a young graduate student in UC Berkeley's English program some thirty years ago, I had no premonition of the sequence of events that would lead to my personal spiritual transformation; a migration to theological studies at the Jesuit School of Theology and the Graduate Theological Union; and a twenty-year odyssey of vocational discovery as a Jesuit in the California Province of the Society of Jesus. So far, I remain full of hope for the future, and my path has proven well worth the gamble of a lifetime.

Throughout these thirty years, theology has been neither a professional avocation nor an academic strategy for me. The "God stuff" of my life and work has always been manifested as an invitation and a question. It mattered little whether the material involved biblical languages and literature, systematics, psychology of religious experience, ritual anthropology, metaphysics and epistemology, music and liturgy, or hermeneutics—the question drew me forward.

Theology has always been a model of holistic discovery, a model of wonder before analysis. The last decade has opened yet further avenues for exploration. Working in a College of Professional Studies, with adult students whose areas of expertise include organizational dynamics and development, or information systems management, has invited me to ground my academic activities in very concrete environments, and in real-world practicalities. In addition, exposure to the blossoming world of telecommunications technology, multimedia, and computing platforms has redirected numerous intellectual foci in my life. I have come to recognize that message, medium, and method, are no longer the discrete entities so energetically pursued in the near past.

My attention has moved from the epistemological and systematic to the neurocognitive and meta-structural. Obviously, I do not expect ever to "answer" my "God question," or even to define its content boundaries. This current undertaking is not intended to persuade or to convert anyone to anything. It is not a methodological critique, nor an attempt to provide the Next Great Thing for theological reflection. It is, more accurately, a series of five informational vignettes, aimed at drawing an imaginative response or inspiring a different mode of inquiry. Indeed, my abiding interest is less in the enterprise of theology (or theologies) than in the *complexus* of influences and inspirations that shapes the person of the theologian. If the theological explorations of the last two centuries have taught us one major lesson, it is that the product is
inseparable from the producer. The possible future roles of theology in the twenty-first century must be attentive to the creative entity that is the theologian or the theological personality. Post-millennial theological method and methodological application require ever greater attention to the producers of method. Theology resides in the theologian, not the reverse. Although my opening remarks point to the identity and formation of the theologian, it must be emphasized at the outset that my intention is not to promote subjectivism, personalism, or any form of subject-focused sentimentality.

My personal pilgrimages through a variety of fields over the last thirty years have consistently focused on a systemic location for my questioning, and a process for tracking the complexity of my learning. Perhaps the simplest way to describe this odyssey is to say that I was not seeking a methodological dwelling so much as a matrix for an intricate network of information. Developments in fields as diverse as quantum mechanics, nonlinear systems theory, fractal mathematics, cybernetics, and neurocognition, are pointing to the interdependencies of elements within systems at whatever degree of scale. These interdependencies are integral to the acquisition, assimilation, and application of information. The emergence of personal computers, global telecommunications networks, multimedia, and other assorted technological devices for information gathering and dissemination, have further nuanced our perceptions of such systems, and their impact on the development of traditional disciplines. Evolving information paradigms and protocols have given rise to a multitude of new perspectives on theories of knowledge, and contexts for theoretical systems. I shall point to three of them here.

The first involves the notion of information networks. Traditional disciplinary efforts have tended to be linear and cumulative, one generation of practitioners building on the foundations laid down by previous experts in the field. I still recall my earliest research ventures into the library stacks, searching for titles I had located through the card catalog. While in that dusty section of shelves, I would peruse the other titles aggregated under a given Library of Congress numbering, occasionally unearthing a real gem. Today, complex database and information systems have created non-linear and associative networks that rely upon data links rather than discipline-specific conceptual connections. The a priori boundaries that have existed between fields of inquiry are being transformed into hermeneutic distinctions, which are dependent upon the specific intentions of the information management project at hand.

The second relates to the complex media in which contemporary information is imbedded. Historically, academic discourse has taken place within a relatively limited and fixed set of media environments—books, monographs, and articles; or lectures, seminars, and symposia. The obvious emphases on verbal/linguistic skills and processing have placed clear limits on accepted materials and modes of expression and communication. In the multimedia world of the Web, CD ROMs, and DVDs, the possibilities of accessing aural, visual, and verbal/linguistic receptors at the same time, are enormously enhanced. The distinction is not a trivial one. By accessing
multiple cognitive processing centers all at once, one not only modifies the *manner* of how formation is held and remembered, but also subtly shifts the conceptual frame in which that information is given meaning. One need not go to the extremes of a Proust novel in demonstrating the impacts of extraversional influences on thinking and communicating to recognize that every human information-input process acts directly upon the information gathered from all the others (whether sensate, conceptual, or imaginative).

The third concerns what I would term "iconic frames" or "iconic maps". Given the epistemological constraints that determine the parameters of discipline-specific content, there are clear markers of what "matters" in discourse, and what is acceptable as evidence. Such constraints establish the "privileged information" within a field of inquiry. Simply put, what is acceptable in assessment of an impressionist painting is not germane to a mathematical proof in calculus. However, in the context of complex information media, the cognitive processes generally associated with logical proof can be linked directly to those associated with aesthetic appreciation. Thus, the "icon," or the complex of significant meaning, becomes more intricate. What the impacts of these media will be in determining the future unfolding of so-called disciplines remains to be seen.

However, the recent unfolding of fractal mathematics and nonlinear dynamic systems is an indication that the possibilities could prove profound indeed. All the studies, tools, and information networks alluded to above have become part of the matrix in which I engage in "theological reflection". I assume theology is but one, complex information processing modality among thousands, and therefore part of a process of system interdependency. The following elements are some among many of the filters or foci through which we can begin to investigate theologians, their theological methods, and their possible message for the future. 'A great deal of research and experimentation is currently being done on the impacts of technological media upon learning and information application. *Syllabus* is a monthly publication dedicated to "technology for higher education." In the most recent issue, Chris Dede, a Harvard professor of Learning Technologies, addresses the positive and negative dimensions of complex media in the current educational environment: "Interactive Media in Education", *Syllabus* 15 (June 2002) 12-14.

The contemporary interface between laboratory science and theoretical mathematics has become more intricate due to the evolution (or revolution) in understanding non-linear systems—systems that do not adhere to the simple, mathematically ordered universe we assumed we lived in since the time of Aristotle. A wonderfully comprehensive yet anecdotal introduction to the issues can be found in James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).
Mary Ann Hinsdale’s Response

David, there are several assumptions that are obvious, perhaps, but remain unarticulated in the introductory section of your paper, that I would like to highlight for discussion. One is that telecommunications technology and the electronic media we use to communicate with each other, acquire needed information, teach, and learn, (only one of which is the personal computer), have created vast information networks and indeed, a whole new cultural reality called "cyberculture". This reality is not just a “sign of the times” that needs to be “read,” but has become the world in which we are reading, interpreting, and discerning signs of the times. This shift has great import for theology and theologians because—to point out another assumption of your presentation—theology is but one, complex information processing modality among thousands, and thus is a part of a process of system interdependency. I think I know what you mean here, but perhaps an example would be helpful.

Todd Gitlin, in Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives, tells this little parable:

A customs officer observes a truck pulling up at the border. Suspicious, he orders the driver out and searches the vehicle. He pulls off panels, bumpers, and wheel cases but finds not a single scrap of contraband, whereupon, still suspicious but at a loss to know where else to search, he waves the driver through. The next week, the same driver arrives. Again, the official searches, and again finds nothing illicit. Over the years, the official tries full-body searches, X rays, and sonar, anything he can think of, and each week the same man drives up, but no mysterious cargo ever appears, and each time, reluctantly, the customs man waves the driver on.

Finally, after many years the officer is about to retire. The driver pulls up. ‘I know you’re a smuggler,’ the customs officer says. Don’t bother denying it. But damned if I can figure out what you’ve been smuggling all these years. I’m leaving now. I swear to you I can do you no harm. Won’t you please tell me what you’ve been smuggling?’ ‘Trucks,’ the driver says.

Pierre Lévy has explored the impact of digital technology on global society, especially in relationship to knowledge and social exclusion in Cyberculture, translated by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Gitlin’s point is that the media have been “smuggling” the habit of living with the media. As he says, “for all the talk…the main truth about the media slips through our fingers. Critics and commentators look for contraband but miss the truck—the immensity of the experience of media, the sheer quantity of attention paid, the devotions and rituals that absorb our time and resources. The obvious but hard-to-grasp truth is that living with the media is today one of the main things Americans and many other human beings do.”²⁰ Let me give my own example, drawn from what it’s been like this year as a theologian living at the epicenter of the current crisis over clerical sexual abuse in Boston.

At first, I used to make sure that I read the newspapers (the Boston Globe and the New York Times) before leaving for school. Now I make sure I have National Public Radio on my clock radio. “Good Morning America” is muted on the TV while I am gathering things up, getting ready to leave. My home computer is powered-up, and I eat breakfast in front of it, checking my New York Times “tracker” to see if there are any articles there, which I then print up and put in my shopping bag of clippings that might prove relevant for the calls from reporters, which I will find on my voicemail when I get to the office. But, on second thought, after checking my Palm Pilot to review the day’s appointments, I realize that I better check my voicemail from the car, which I do using my cell phone (wearing a headset, of course!), all the while listening to “Morning Edition,” on the way to the university.

When I get there, I find several crises that need immediate attention, have a class to prepare, teach, and still further decisions to make about how I will participate in this whole system of communications. The editor of the BC Alumni magazine wants a short piece on the crisis from me. A call comes from Los Angeles. Will I be able to do an interview on a noontime radio show? The publicist from a local PBS newsmagazine calls. Can I make a 4:00 p.m. taping? Fortunately, I can’t. We have a department meeting. But she doesn’t give up, and I get another call the next day.

Now, it is important to point out that all of this is also dependent upon whether there is a power outage that prevents my access to any of these electronic information media; whether the server is “down,” whether I’m in a “bad patch” so my cell phone “breaks up,” and, of course, whether I have the time or will make the time to utilize these systems. So, I must say, reflecting upon the complex world of information systems that make up my daily world made me appreciate more than ever what Michael Himes was saying Thursday night regarding time—it is not just the envelope in which we live, but is the center of our finite being.

You will recall Michael gave that wonderful example drawn from his own personal history “in time” in order to remind us that Jesus’ human existence, too, is the result of a series of such

²⁰ Gitlin, 5.
chance human meetings, and that this is what is involved in speaking of the Incarnation as God entering time and history. I wonder if perhaps there is a connection here in what you are saying about the non-linear and associative networks that rely on “data links” rather than “discipline-specific” conceptual connections?

You also seem to be telling us that “theological reflection” involves more than theology, something that I think most of us in this room would agree with. Therefore, according to your definition, theology is “but one, complex information system processing modality among thousands… a part of a process of system interdependency.” Perhaps it is the “process of system interdependency” where one locates the activity of “reading the signs of the times?”

I would want to add, however, that there is more to theological reflection than simply attending to present signs. As a theologian, I also access the past [the tradition] to discern whether what is happening now is in continuity with it or stands as an interruption. Theologians are called upon to use their imaginations, drawing upon symbols that speak to the community or culture in which one is located. This is necessary in order to move to a constructive moment, to re-define, or express in new language (by which I mean more than words) a response to the creative action of God’s Spirit working in these very “signs” which are being “read.”

David, your paper tells us that diverse fields are pointing to the interdependence of elements within systems, no matter what the difference of scale. These interdependencies are integral to the acquisition, assimilation, and application of information. Here again, I would be helped by some concrete applications, by some examples of how this would work in theology. Let me try this one.

I recently gave a continuing education workshop to pastoral ministers on “Women Leaders in the Early Church.” The presentation involved using various scripture texts, but also images from art, which illustrated, for example, how the character of Mary Magdalen has been conflated from a number of Gospel passages (i.e., the sinner woman who anoints Jesus, Mary of Bethany, the woman caught in adultery, Mary Magdalen as the first witness to the resurrected Jesus, etc.).

I used PowerPoint to show the images and present students with examples of the renewed attention that both scholars and activists are paying to the figure of Mary Magdalen. For example, I pointed out how the process of canon formation excluded texts from the New Testament that were labeled “gnostic” (i.e., the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Phillip, the Sophia of Jesus Christ, but that feminist biblical scholarship is currently investigating these texts for the light they shed on the figure of Mary Magdalen, as well as the whole issue of women’s leadership in the early Christian community. Secondly, we reviewed the efforts of Christian women (mainly Catholic) who are proposing alternative liturgies that can be held on July 22nd, the feast day of Mary Magdalen, as a way of recalling women’s leadership in the past and the
need for new models in the present. My own acquisition of information here involved not only “texted artifacts,” but use of the web (where I found most of the digital art images, as well as the website for Future Church and its Mary Magdalen liturgy).

The assimilation process involved my recalling previous studies in ecumenical dialogues concerning the role of Peter in the New Testament that were done some years ago, and how useful they became for reaching agreement between Roman Catholics and Lutherans on the notion of a “Petrine function” present in the New Testament, that could perhaps provide eventual ecumenical consensus on the notion of papal primacy.²¹

I began to think, where might our discussions concerning women’s leadership in the church go if we could propose a “Magdalen function” or “Magdalen principle” that could serve as a scriptural basis for women’s leadership in the church -- one that could be institutionalized as an office? This would certainly be, to use your framework, a new application—a new “iconic frame.” I am sure that there would be plenty of discussion and debate concerning whether my proposal was based upon “acceptable evidence”, and whether I, as a systematic/constructive theologian, have a right to work with the “privileged information” that belongs to another field of inquiry. But this is how I am understanding what you are saying.

Feedback Loop—1

Mary Ann, your choice of illustrative examples is wonderfully apt, practical, and evocative. I am particularly taken with the metaphor of the truck! There is an important feature to note about Gitlin’s story—there are two key elements, the truck, and the truck driver. We are all aware that there are varied sizes and shapes of trucks—from pickups to 18-wheelers. Many observers of today’s information technology culture view communications media as a runaway 18-wheeler on a very steep hill, heading for a cliff! However, if there is a contraband truck, there is also a smuggler driving that truck. Through centuries of evolving societies—from the agrarian, to the urban, to the industrial, to the post-industrial—there have been systems (social, political, economic, and intellectual) that have also seemed to be runaway 18-wheelers. To continue Gitlin’s metaphors, theologians have been like the customs officers at the border (hopefully with greater success), helping to regulate the trucks and drivers of culture by investigating the face of the human and the divine as these are manifested historically, scripturally, liturgically, and so forth. The post-millennial theologian is simply continuing that practice, but now is also a passenger (and a potential driver) of communications media ‘trucks,’ who can help discern the appropriate ‘size’ of the vehicles, and what should be their cargo (both traditional and innovative) and destination.

Your Mary Magdalen example is a pastoral and practical demonstration of the way traditional texts and disciplines can be combined with media and internet elements to provide a hybrid information resource. As a result, the acquisition, assimilation, and application process you underwent in preparing your workshop provided a more nuanced and layered experience for participants, who were not restricted simply to ‘texted artifacts,’ or a lecture.

Apologetics: Then and Now

On March 5, 2002, Archbishop William Levada of San Francisco gave a presentation at the University of San Francisco entitled "A New Apologetics for the New Millennium". Drawing from Avery Dulles's work on the history of apologetics, written in the period after the Second Vatican Council, Levada traced three major currents. The first involved social explanation—attempting to clarify to a mistrusting culture that Christians were not dangerous fanatics or a threat to common order. In the second, apologetics attempted to gain an evangelical foothold in the religious worlds of Judaism, Islam, and, more recently, the world of agnosticism and atheism. In the third, a modern "apologist" aims at the "infidel" within the contemporary believer—a void of connection to the practice of the tradition itself.

Levada's baseline point was that apologetics needs a renaissance in today's Catholic community, to address the disconnection between faith and reason, and culture and religious/spiritual affect. The Archbishop was forthrightly addressing a sensed need for clarity of evangelization—a clarity of medium, message, and practice. His broad thematic brush strokes outlined a canvas that could include scripture, liturgy, ecclesial history, pastoral practice, philosophical inquiry, etc. Why is such a plea for apologetics pertinent here? If the theological community writ large (most certainly that in the Roman Catholic sector) has experienced Magna Carta moments in the last century, they have been precisely through liberation from the role of "apologist", from the strictures of explaining and/or justifying the "deposit of tradition."

Having begun my own explorations during the flowering of an American reconstruction of liturgies and catechetics, I quickly became aware of the urgency felt to link the theological enterprise to as many pertinent fields of inquiry outside ecclesial circles as possible. Indeed, the historical, anthropological, philosophical, psychological, and sociological, investigations that had entered the theological sphere during preceding decades were symptomatic of a felt need to "move" theology into an intellectual mainstream of inquiry that was both conversant and compatible with the physical and social sciences.

By the end of the millennium, this movement was deeply entrenched. Theology, the medieval "Queen of the Sciences," had been almost fully transfigured into a companion among sister disciplines. However, a critical distinction remained. If we trace the development of the roots
and methods of the physical and social sciences, each has a specific sphere of investigation, a process for acquiring and analyzing information, and a discipline-specific product that results.

Simplistically put, historians have an "apologetic" for history (allowing for scholastic differences, which may be paralleled to "denominations" within a religious tradition), psychologists have an "apologetics" for psychology, and so forth.

I realize such statements can sound like naive disciplinary reductionism, but there is a point to be made that is worth the risk. Theology as a discipline (or discipline set) was spawned from the experienced "God stuff" of living individuals and cultures. Its apologetic foundations derived from an experiential urge to explain and explore the lived roots of a faith community and of individuals, from a shared locus of spiritual identity and religious practice. As it has assimilated itself to a variety of empirical disciplines (to good ends!), its modus vivendi has often been supplanted by its modus operandi. In an attempt to match the empirical clarity of the physical or social sciences, theological disciplines have often adopted a clinical detachment and methodological precision that can transplant them to an observational plane quite outside the grounding experiences of the communities that gave them birth. This methodological disconnection from origins has its costs in limiting both interpretation and communication.

Why should this matter? In the burgeoning computer age of information networks, it has become increasingly apparent that each system dedicated to acquiring, assimilating, and applying information has its individual set of what might be called "systems component interfaces". For a computer, these component interfaces might be designated simply as the hardware, the software code, and the media connection to the "consumer" (texts, audio, video, images, and graphics—whatever is generated for absorption by the user). Clearly, all these elements are essential to the complete experience of working with information in a computer environment. However, the emphasis has progressively been placed more firmly on the quality of the media connection, since this is the interface that most directly impacts the depth and effectiveness of the interaction between computer and user. Those of us privileged or cursed to have been introduced to the world of personal computers more than a decade ago can recall the terrors of the evolving GUI (the Graphical User Interface—what actually met us on the screen). To the extent that our computer was able to mediate information to us from the dark labyrinth of its inner workings, or carry the messages we typed with dubious fingers into the fragile recesses of its hard drive—we were delirious or despondent, often left unsure how secure and durable the transaction had been.

At the risk of creating an overly intricate metaphor, we might compare the repository of information in theological disciplines (scripture, systematics, history, etc.) to hard drive memory, method or methodological procedures, to the software code, and various products (books, articles, lectures) to the media connection. I would submit that, although our repository of information is sizeable, its range of use is currently quite restricted by the software code of our
methodological practice. Moreover, our media connection is even more constrained by the boundaries of our academic disciplines. All this metaphor-making is not just an exercise in rhetorical flourishes. It simply provides a more imagistic sort of shorthand for the deeper elements at play within theological practice. The issue at hand is a heuristic one. In fields as diverse as artificial intelligence and cognitive information chunking, practitioners are grappling with the manner in which we (or future thinking machines) are able to develop associative links across dissimilar fields of information, to formulate conceptual and imaginative connections that provide answers to complex questions, or solutions to unsolved problems. In any information-processing endeavor more intricate than counting and reporting the number of jellybeans in a candy jar, each of the elements outlined above plays a major role. The scope of our basic data sets (our hard drive), the range and flexibility of our methodological procedures (our software code), and the variety and impact of our communication (our media connections), each and all determine what we hold as legitimate knowledge or learning. I suspect that one of the most significant points of development in theological dialogue over the next fifty years will be the determination of our heuristic process—what do we include in our information universe, how do we allow ourselves to process and transmit that information, and how do we apply it?

To continue the computer metaphor—the unfolding of our media connections will ultimately redefine the heuristic paradigms we embrace within the envelope of theological exploration. The historical spectrum of theological communication has moved from a catechetical frame to an ecclesial one; then from a philosophical/scholastic perspective to one modeled on the social sciences. The geometric expansion of our data sets in the coming decades, coupled with ever more intricate methodological procedures, will finally be melded into a new set of media possibilities that will impel a redefinition of method and disciplinary praxis. It may seem a convoluted journey to have initiated this reflection in the realm of apologetics and to end in the arena of heuristics. However, the theological disciplines are, in effect, the apologists of their methodological inclusions (and exclusions). Perhaps Archbishop Levada was ultimately prescient on a scale he never intended.

The Gutenberg Hologram

There have been few mechanical devices with more direct historical impact on the unfolding of scholarly enterprises than the printing press. Walter Ong and others have documented extensively the movement from cultures of orality to those with scripted traditions—papyri, scrolls, tablets, manuscripts, etc. In the ever more complex world of academic disciplines, professors are finding it increasingly difficult to coordinate the amount of material needed for comprehensive coverage within a field. One response has been the practice of "chunking," in which groups of practitioners divide up a project, each providing a slice of the whole. Then, each member of the group can use the aggregate materials as needed. The process is based on an

Walter Ong has certainly been one of the pioneering figures in dealing with the Beyond the Gutenberg Hologram. However, it was not until the establishment of the Gutenberg press and its more sophisticated successors that the modern forms of scholarly argumentation and demonstration developed their present range and scope. Our interest here is not in the history of the printed page, but in the social impacts of volume printing, of the "book form", and of the iconic value of "texted artifacts".

I would assert, without fear of contradiction, that there is not a scholar in the current Academy on the lee side of 40 years, who has not been fundamentally shaped in his or her learning process by what I term the Gutenberg Hologram. A hologram is essentially a three-dimensional image generated by laser illumination from a two-dimensional data set. In the case of the traditional book, what has "leaped off the page" is more than an idea or a process. Centuries of use and familiarity have generated an entire iconography of texts that is extraordinarily powerful. For many, even the physical shape, texture, and heft of a book carry mythical, if not religious, power.

The hologram under consideration here, extends to include the socialization of readers into singular modes of thinking and into valorization of individual forms of rationality. In this generation of e-books and online journals, it is altogether possible to obtain and use an enormous variety of text items, without ever passing one's hands along the spine of a book, or running one's finger down the reassuring and tangible face of a printed page. Yet for some, there is a nearly visceral reaction to the loss of the "texted artifact". The convenience of anytime/anywhere access to a virtual universe of information is small consolation in the face of losing contact with a treasured cultural icon.

In the "world of the book" (putting narrative to the side), most educational, scholarly, and theoretical writing follows a simple and obvious pattern. Authors commence with a premise (sometimes left implicit), provide a wealth of supporting information, and then offer a conclusion. This prominent method is linear and probative, a laudable means of helping many readers to track a logical pattern of thought. However, the probative and the linear constitute only one dimension of the intricate web that is the neural processing matrix of a human brain. Much has been written in the last thirty years regarding the so-called right- and left-brain hemispheres, or the frontal or corticular functions as these relate to limbic and motivational systems. Although many of the division-of-labor neural models that prevailed until recently have come under serious scrutiny and revision, they offered one important insight into human mental function. The verbal-cognitive operations that are so central to language, logic, and linear rationality are part of a fascinatingly complex set of processes, that also includes memory, imagination, emotion, etc. Even more important, the impact of texts on culture and cognition.
Allegedly "higher" functions are not discrete or separated from the neural network that is the human personality in total.

In the flowering of information technologies and multimedia, a different learning hologram is coming into prominence. Whereas the physical form of the book promotes a linear and sequential process, the Internet, specifically the Worldwide Web, is establishing a pattern that offers an associative, frequently multiplatform, environment. Through hyperlinks and interactive media, web-based information does not unfold in an A-to-Z progression. Frequently, an exploration online might involve an AtoLtoDtoQtoC type of non-linear and non-textual investigation, thereby employing the neural patterns associated with narrative, symbol, visual imagery, aural impressions—a plethora of information transmitters. When information is gathered and processed in this non-linear manner, the learner's options for uncovering new conceptual connections or symbolic value are enormously enhanced. Those of us who, like Alice through the Looking Glass, have burrowed through multiple layers of hyperlinked website materials can attest to the fact that our original motivations or intentions for an online search often smile at us like the Cheshire Cat, as we realize the parameters with which we began our investigation are inadequate to the richness of the information we have uncovered.

The Gutenberg Hologram is a culturally defined mode of perception, that shapes the normative values of scholarly and academic enterprises. The intention here is not to denigrate either the historical or contemporary significance, or the worth, of this hologram. Rather, a question is being raised about the implications of placing such exclusive emphasis on the products and processes that the hologram inculcates. This is not a call to book burning or to dismantling the educational structures of centuries. Instead, it is an invitation to reflect on the ways in which the informational and hermeneutic boundaries of this hologram can be expanded and nuanced. We hearken back to the comments made at the outset of this exploration—one need not look to redefining theological disciplines so much as exploring new means and modes of creating the theological personality. The emotive, relational, somatic, aesthetic, spiritual, and psychic dimensions of human knowing are not simply addenda to "higher" order reason. They are intrinsic c-coccreators of the cognitive framework that constitutes thinking.

'Although criticized for some of their choices of neurocognitive models, James Ashbrook and Carol Albright have attempted to make a direct link between neural functioning, and the seemingly hardwired human propensity for God experience and God language. (See James B. Ashbrook and Carol Rausch Albright, The Humanizing Brain: Where Religion and Neuroscience Meet (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997) esp. part 2). 'Paul Soukup, Frank Buckley, and I have written on the subject of information technologies and their impact on contemporary theologizing or knowing. (See Paul A. Soukup, S.J., Frank J. Buckley, S.J., and David C.

**Beyond the Gutenberg Hologram**

Theological disciplines offer a unique "geography" in which to link discipline-specific activities to a wide range of experiential endeavors that could carry theology into a fascinating new venue. To return to our controlling metaphors of hardware, software, and media connections, it seems evident that the new options proposed above would contribute to a significant expansion of each. Although the data set held in our theological memory bank might not shift all that radically, our "software" codes (methodological options) and our media connections (products of inquiry) would expand enormously.

**Epistemological and Cognitive Paradigms**

Exploration of the human mind and its workings has been a source of fascination in Western tradition at least since the time of the pre-Socratics. "Thinking about thinking" has not only become a foundational practice in philosophical and psychological endeavors and has also established the paradigms for defining virtually all measures of intelligence and learning. The reigning Ratio for traditions of liberal education, and even the learning systems for many fields in professional studies, rests on epistemological foundations. As one who spent the better part of two decades in various modes of epistemological investigation, I well understand the attraction of the endeavor. Much as the artist or musician muses on aesthetic creation, or the athlete on physical performance, those who are taken up with the nature and operation of thought are prone to reflect on the qualities of thinking functions.

Nonetheless, the observations offered in our consideration of apologetics and the Gutenberg Hologram once again give us pause, for a simple reason. Sequential and linear systems operations produce the epistemological premises and structures that shape valued learning—the process is circular or tautological, equivalent to saying that rational learning is rational. The majority of our definitions of intelligence (Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory to the contrary!), derives from the application of a limited set of functions within. Despite their propensity for complicated and occasionally abstruse analyses, the biogenetic structuralists, during the last two decades, have attempted to explicate the links between the operational environment (the external world of the percipient) and the cognized environment of the individual. They view human consciousness as a symbolic process, uniting external events, perception, cognition, and action. Symbolic meaning provides a wider category for understanding the "mind" than verbal and rational capacity. (See Charles Laughlin, John McManus, and Eugene d'Aquili, *Brain, Symbol, and Experience: Toward a Neurophenomenology of Human Consciousness* (Boston: New Science Library, 1990). The

Howard Gardner's work with Project Zero at Harvard has marked a breakthrough in the cerebral cortex, that are largely sequential, linguistic, and quantitative, placing the associative, imagistic, and qualitative in a secondary frame of reference. Anyone who has pursued the Western educational ideal to its apex can attest to the primacy of verbal, argumentative, quantifiable processes in any measures of success. Once again, this statement is not a criticism, but merely an observation of the traditional set of values that is inculcated and promulgated in the formation of the intellectual or academic personality.

We certainly could not have amassed the wealth of empirical, theoretical, and informational data extant in our culture without such skill sets. Yet, it must be asserted forthrightly that these skills do not constitute the entirety, or even the most important part, of human learning.

Given an expanded notion of intelligence generally, and theological capacity specifically, it behooves us to move the discussion from the realm of the epistemological to that of the cognitive. It appears that many in the philosophical community have been accustomed to using the two terms almost interchangeably. Therefore, I take this opportunity to make a critical distinction in our contemporary context. Epistemology is the study of the nature and means of knowing. Cognition is the operational means by which knowing is realized. Epistemology observes our perceived modes of thinking and learning, while cognitive exploration observes how brains work, while thinking and learning. Admittedly, the latter can never be completely divorced from the former, since the observer's methodology (an epistemological premise) clearly impacts the observer's perceptions. Nonetheless, cognitive studies attempt to provide a more global perspective on the totality of the human mental process (or processes).

Why is this distinction significant in a reflection on the possibilities for future theological development? While the models for method are validated by a set of epistemological premises, these models will be perpetuated indefinitely. In cybernetic terms, the models exist in a positive feedback loop, an information set that reinforces the status quo, and therefore puts off any sort of change indefinitely. An obvious parallel in the empirical sciences can be found in the arena of quantum and relativity physics. For centuries, the presuppositions about the nature of space, time, and matter continued largely unchanged, because the foundations of empirical epistemology demanded adherence to certain data sets and observation patterns. Once the mathematical intuitions of Einstein and others (often garnered by imaginative means completely outside the empirical paradigm!) showed the incompleteness of that reigning paradigm, the associated physical disciplines made an incredible leap forward in assimilating a broader range of information, that had previously been neglected or discarded, transcending the traditional

'The discovery of the "nonlinear logic" of the quantum universe marked a threshold experience for the empirical sciences equal to any in their history. For a brief discussion, Theological disciplines may not be in line for changes on the same order of magnitude, but the principle remains the same. The more comprehensive our awareness and appreciation of the complexities of human cognition, and the more expansive our willingness to explore the implications of the hidden and neglected talents within the brain, the more available we are for the next quantum level of discovery.

As much of the linear rigor of theoretical empirical science has been mitigated through the unique discoveries of system-shattering cognitive breakthroughs, so the theological enterprise stands to benefit enormously from a similar openness to a heretofore unimagined set of integrative principles or hermeneutic insights. Throughout history, the human brain has always managed to outstrip our notions of the boundaries of intelligence in our definitions of mind.

**Linear and Nonlinear Systems**

There have been few greater breakthroughs in the evolution of modern science than the discovery of the reality and operation of nonlinear systems. After centuries of enculturation to the dogma of the Aristotelian and Newtonian universes—with their concise and predictable mathematical connectedness—scientific theory has uncovered the fundamental principle that linear predictability is an illusory, local phenomenon that is not transferable to reality as a whole. It is no longer acceptable to ground empirical theory on the assumption there exists a mathematically coordinated whole, which can be effectively dissected into disciplined segments or fragments, each with quantitative, linear measures that can be indefinitely enhanced and refined. The universe is a complex of probabilities and contingencies, incapable of reduction to deterministic chains of causes and effects.

One of the most significant byproducts of this new empirical sensibility has been the exploration of nonlinear systems and nonlinear dynamics. Areas as diverse as weather prediction, and calculating water flow in an irrigation canal, have benefited from a growing awareness that these oddly unpredictable systems are more than simply the sum of their parts. Two plus two will not regularly yield four. Mapped as grids of data or information, nonlinear processes will display odd clusters of "attractors"—certain patterns of behavior that are not congruent with an arithmetic sum of the elements. In scientific cultures that had frequently drifted toward various types of determinisms, the discovery of nonlinearity marked yet another paradigm shift from the certitudes of a Newtonian world.

Human persons and organizations are viewed through the lens of connections rather than that of distinctions. Open-systems strategies are based on the premise that living organisms and their interactions are ultimately linked at all levels, and not finally subject to the dualisms and divisions that we so often layer upon our perceptions of reality.10 Most disciplines define boundaries by exclusion rather than inclusion, setting up polarities between one information set and another. Open systems promote an intellectual holism that invites points of congruence in place of separation.

For many of us, a nonfamiliarity with such open systems may lead to images of positive thinking and group affirmation, as if this were simply a matter of respect or concern for the other. This is not the case. An open systems process builds on the foundation that all information networks are ultimately interconnected. Centuries of linear investigations, especially in the physical sciences, have acclimated us to strategies of discovering particularities in their uniqueness, rather than to processes of interconnectedness. However, it must be emphasized that this is not a naive holism either.

Perhaps the evolving history of the medical model of health can provide us with a practical exemplar. In pre-empirical cultures, the health of the human person is frequently viewed through a lens that emphasizes the well-being of the entire organism, spiritually, psychologically, and somatically. However, the lack of clinical exactness in diagnosis prevents addressing a discrete condition, such as a liver disorder, or an aortic blockage. With the growth of a highly technical medical process, it is quite natural (and certainly the experience of Western medicine in the first seventy-five years of the twentieth century) to focus on a restricted area of diagnostic analysis, to the neglect of the patient as a whole human being. In the last quarter century, the realization that all aspects of the individual (psychic, somatic, social, and ecological) are integrally linked in the optimization of health (or of healing), has begun moving the health professions steadily toward a more open systems approach to diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment protocols. This is one indicator of the ways in which highly linear disciplines can be adapted to a more nonlinear, interconnected mode of operating.

In the theological arena, nonlinear and open systems offer us a context for realizing synergistic links between our data, our methods, and our modes of communicating, as well as for forging the points of connection to other fields of inquiry. Closed system strategies have long impacted traditional academic enterprises, with various dualisms, hierarchies of authority, the cult of
expertise, etc. A closed system relies upon reifications to establish artificial boundaries and distinctions, employing strategies of control, classification, and subordination to maintain a temporary sense of equilibrium in a location of imbalance. For a concise and enlightening exploration of the complex systems structure of human thought, genetic coding, and feedback networks, see John Briggs and F. David Peat, *Turbulent Mirror* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989): 153-80). With an open systems model, the ideal is to realize a maximum interconnection of all information, and to minimize the exclusion of any parties. From such a vantage, discovery is enhanced, and systemic politics is diminished.

Those shaped in the Academy during the last 50 years can readily attest to the community pressures directing one to an ever-tighter disciplinary focus as part of initiation into the "guild". Work across disciplines was viewed with suspicion in many circles as a sort of dabbling that diluted concentration on the primary work of the field. The move toward new, interdisciplinary endeavors during the last decade or so indicates a growing dissatisfaction among certain scholars with the exclusive linearity of an earlier model. However, there is still much work remaining if we are seeking to migrate to open systems strategies in our academic enterprises. The connections implicit within complex data systems and networks may provide us with fruitful analogies in our future efforts.

**The Methods of Cyber-Theology**

Having investigated the implications of various cognitive and nonlinear models for theological thought and methods, we can briefly focus our attention on a global medium for change—the cosmos of computer and information technologies. Although the computer, as a machine, operates on a limited, sequential, and quantifiable pattern of information bytes, its ability to aid in synthesizing and disseminating information positions it powerfully in a time of systemic transition, not only in the enhancement of knowledge, but the transformation of learning. As a communication tool, the computer permits us to aggregate text, image, sound, and video within a single context, vastly expanding the cognitive impact of whatever materials are presented. This potential offers a wealth of opportunity to every academic enterprise, including theology, to integrate multiple layers of information.

We have only begun to explore the potentials of visual and sonic media within the world of cyber-communication and learning. Since the advent of information broadcasting (radio, television, film), we have tended to see discrete media as accessories to verbal/linguistic processes in learning or in academic projects. That an aggregate of media connections (both aural and visual) could be employed all at once is a new prospect, and certainly more than a purely environmental one. This is not a "spoonful of sugar" initiative, intended to lure a generation of TV-hypnotized minds into the intricacies of linear logic. This is a new paradigm for *acquiring* and *assimilating* information. The world of virtual reality simulations, for example,
is not a comic-book version of the "real thing"—be it physics or political science—but an integrated information matrix that allows individuals to receive and locate material in a more integral cognitive framework. Recent developments in computer processing have begun to push the envelope of machine "intelligence." Once machines could only mimic the linear, logical aspects of human thought (the first area where a computer could compete on a global scale with an expert in a noncomputational exercise was in chess).

It is a telling feature of our cognitive makeup that the elements of symbolic association, imagination, intuitive insight—the qualities we most readily neglect in our empirical ambitions as thinkers—are the ones most distinctly human, and the ones most difficult to emulate mechanically. As those within the theological disciplines explore future possibilities for method, a deep inspection of such elements might be in order. Computer capacity will urge us in that direction, as the erstwhile tool begins to approximate the complex reality that is a human colleague. How odd it is that we often cherish those abilities in our intellectual companions, that are most akin to generic mechanical functions—data manipulation, linear logic, etc., while neglecting those inherent aptitudes that truly humanize us.

Computer simulations first pointed contemporary mathematicians and physicists in the direction of nonlinear dynamics, chaos theory, fractal imagery, and other post-Newtonian discoveries about the unpredictable ways of the natural order. Theology in the twenty-first century may well glean helpful metaphors, and even unique approaches to method, by giving more attention to such discoveries. It may be more than a bit ironic that theological reflection, which gleaned its historical foundations from the experience of divine interaction with the mundane, may have to look to other intellectual resources to rekindle the wonder of divine initiative at work beneath the surface of our experience as thinkers.

**Conclusion**

The five preceding information vignettes provide us with glimpses of the new horizons awaiting theology as an academic discipline in the coming decades. As we progressively refine and develop the means by which we acquire, assimilate, and apply information, we shall be called upon to reimage some of the foundational ways in which we design our disciplinary criteria and projects, uncovering a new apologetic for theological study and reflection. With the gradual eclipsing of texted artifacts as the predominant tools of analysis and communication, we shall uncover more of the potentials of complex media for articulating our theological insights and intentions in more elaborate and comprehensive iconic frames.

With ever greater attention being paid to the effective and accurate transmission of information, it will be incumbent upon us to maximize the efficacy of our "media." Simply put, our methodological strategies will require enhanced attention to the cognitive impacts of what we
say, and how we say it. Clarity of epistemological design will no longer suffice. With a
geometric increase in the quantity of data resources, we can rely less and less on an intellectual
process of distinctions or exclusions, and must create a new, open systems dynamic for linking
information, a dynamic that relies upon connectivity and feedback to promote insight and
discovery. All these emerging horizons of human thinking and knowing will self-direct and self-
correct in consort with the evolving universe of information and media technologies.

In sum, the new cosmos of technologies (computers, multimedia, telecommunications networks,
etc.) will become infused into our learning process, and will call us forward into a compellingly
new world of resources and perceptions. This next step in the evolution of consciousness and
intelligence will afford us opportunities to move beyond the linear strategies of our traditions,
and to redefine the iconic boundaries of our expression, boundaries so long defined by the impact
of the Gutenberg Hologram. The decision to view the systemic and cognitive changes of the new
millennium as Creation or as Armageddon resides with us. We cannot know what the odds are
for our ultimate success, and there certainly are no guarantees, but the potential should prove
well worth the gamble of a lifetime.
Communicative Theology: An Introduction

February 2008

Dear Colleague:

Re: Communicative Theology

As many folks know, I have spent more than fifteen years working with colleagues on the new field of thought we have called Communication Theology (CT). My interest began at a Seminar in Rome on ‘Ecclesiology and Communication.’ It has grown with a decade of CT seminars Bob Bonnot and I have organized at the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) conventions – with strong support from CTSA leadership. These meetings have brought theologians and communication specialists together for dialogue.

You may also have heard of a movement called Communicative Theology, developed in Europe. This has been conceptualized and practiced by Matthias Scharer, professor of practical theology in the fields of catechetics and religion, University of Innsbruck, and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, professor of dogmatic theology and the history of dogma, University of Tübingen.

Two U.S. theologians have linked with this work: Bradford Hinze at Fordham and Mary Ann Hinsdale, IHM, at Boston College. From February 28 to March 1, at Fordham, a small group has been invited to meet Scharer and Hilberath and participate in a Symposium on Communicative Theology around the theme: “The Gift and Challenge of Intercultural Communication.” I have been invited and will attend.

This symposium will consist largely of small groups, with a leader, and will utilize the process of Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) developed by the psychoanalyst and social-education theorist, Ruth C. Cohn. The integration of the TCI hermeneutic into Theology is explained in a soon-to-be-published translation of The Practice of Communicative Theology: Introduction to a New Theological Culture (Crossroad).

After studying the Scharer/Hilberath book I must say I respect greatly the work they have done. I especially admire how their work has practical application ‘on the ground.’ What we have been doing I would consider (in their words) ‘theology at the desk.’

I feel both CT tracks can complement and enrich each other.

I have provided below some key ideas from the Scharer/Hilberath book.

**Selected Ideas (Organized by Frances Forde Plude)**

The theological work of Scharer and Hilberath represents pedagogy, group process and adult faith formation influenced by Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI), developed by Ruth C. Cohn. The authors have developed a series of five-day seminars for persons working in ecclesial communities and in schools. They have also organized two large meetings at the University of Innsbruck and in Stuttgart. The U.S. theologian Bradford Hinze has been present at the European conferences and has written the Introduction to this book.

Hinze notes in his Introduction there have been four influential approaches to modes of communication in North American theology (p. 3ff):

- dialogical personalism in the life of faith
- a hermeneutic of discourse in the church, academy, and society
- communication in the construction of local theologies; and
- the ‘new Areopagus’ established by modern communication technologies.

Hinze states:

(These authors) are experimenting with, and reflecting on, group processes that promote personal and collective discernment and decision making in the church. Their main achievement is that they have developed a theologically integrated approach to group communicative practices… that speaks out of the word and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council… (and) embodies some of the most important insights into the practices of Base Christian Communities and Small Christian Communities… (p. 9)

See Model below:

**Vocabulary and Models of Communicative Theology and Theme Centered Interaction**

(Ruth Cohn’s Model) (Scharer/Hilberath Communicative Theology)

I = Individuals with their life and faith history

We = People in groups, communities, with their inter-communication
Some Basic Principles of Communicative Theology

- The practice of faith is a point of departure; this is a communicative process.

- Communication between God and human beings reveals truth in relationship (p. 20).

- The search for ‘truth in relationship’ characterizes theological inquiry as a communicative theology event (p. 20).

- In the relationship between theologians doing scholarly work and pastoral ministers working in parishes the former is ‘theology done in official quarters and imparted from the top down’… this may be correct, but it will not alter practice (p. 22).

- Communicative Theology sees ‘conflict-rich confrontation at the border’ (from Habermas’s theory of communicative action); the ‘globe’ in which Communicative Theology takes place (God, the world) involves ‘confrontation and difference’ (p. 38).

- Communicative Theology remains open to issues of prayer, liturgy and mystical experiences (p. 39).

- The fundamentalist refuses to go to the roots of communicative processes (p. 44).

- Churches and theology cannot escape the globalization of communication nor the trend toward more effective communication.

- With Vatican II “the accent shifted from strictly unilateral communicative action on God’s part to differentiated and mutual action involving the human respondent, making the communicative event clearly recognizable as the defining feature” (p. 72).

- Today, “it is difficult to experience a church structured on hierarchical communication as being a credible witness to the participatory self-revelation of God” (p. 77).

Selective areas for further research/development noted by Scharer/Hilberath (p. 169ff):
• Tools needed for analysis of the theology implicit in communication processes;
• Identifying communicative theologies in diocesan synods, pastoral conferences, etc.
• How can the TCI ‘communicative’ and the ‘systematic’ be reconciled with each other?
• How can input be structured so as not to distort the communication process?

[Other areas are also listed by the authors.]
Communicative Theology Conference: Fordham, Feb 2008

Hosts: Brad Hinze, Mary Ann Hinsdale, Matthias Scharer, Jochen Hilberath

[Communicative Theology has been developed in Europe by Matthias Scharer and Jochen Hilberath, based upon the earlier work of Ruth Cohn’s Theme Centered Interaction (TCI). Two U.S. theologians, Brad Hinze and Mary Ann Hinsdale, have worked closely with Scharer and Hilberath in organizing research; conferences there were based on the following theoretical model.]

Vocabulary & Models of Communicative Theology & Theme Centered Interaction (TCI)

[The model is pictured with the first three as triangle points, enclosed in a circle - the Globe.]

(Cohn TCI Model)  (Scharer/Hilberath Communicative Theology)

I = Individuals with their life and faith history

We = People in groups, communities, with their inter-communication

It (content) = The faith tradition

Globe (environment) = The global reality of society and church

The NYC Conference below was attended by a group of theologians from the U.S. and Europe.

The Challenge and Gift of Intercultural Communication
Conference Overview

Thursday, February 28, 2008

6:00 p.m. Dinner

7:00 p.m. Conference begins: Introduction of the Topic of the Conference
           Session Leaders: Brad Hinze and Mary Ann Hinsdale

7:00-7:15 p.m. Brad welcomed everyone and introduced the theme of the Conference: The Challenge and Gift of Intercultural Communication: How will we proceed by using Communicative Theology?
7:15-7:30 p.m. Mary Ann described the group: geographically, institutionally, in terms of generations, in universities, dioceses, parishes, intercultural work and invited everyone to enter groups of three and discuss the following question:

7:30 p.m. Subtopic: *What is my relationship with the topic? How are intercultural issues important for you?*

7:45 p.m. Matthias Scharer and Jochen Hilberath described how we will work; what our style is; how the content of theology (the “It”) is present throughout our work.

The same small groups were gathered and each individual had an opportunity to offer their answer to the question: Subtopic - *When I hear you, Matthias and Jochen, what comes to my mind?*

9:00 p.m. Closing Prayer / Latino/Latina

9:36 p.m. Train from Fordham to Grand Central

9:30-10:00 p.m. Small Group Leaders’ Meeting

10:36 p.m. Train Leaves for Grand Central; arrives 10:57 p.m.

**Friday February 29th**

8:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast at Fordham

9:00 a.m. Morning Prayer / African American tradition

9:15-10:30 a.m. Second Session

9:15-9:20 a.m. Session Leader (Daniela Kästle)

Mary Ann Hinsdale introduced the session by bridging the discussion and experience from the previous evening (taking into account the problems we experienced—e.g., cold blowers, people in second row couldn't see the diagram on the floor, people tired after big meal and traveling.

9:20 a.m. Daniela invited Matthias to say something about the “I” dimension TCI TOPIC: “The “I” and its Theological Significance
The task: “Why it is important to begin with the biographical? (Matthias)

9:25-9:35 a.m. THEME: Cultural Pride, Shame, Conflict: How does it influence my theologizing? (Daniela Kästle)

9:35-9:45 a.m. Small Group Formation—2 or 3 leaders per group
Group Leader Partners: Teresa Peter and Edmund Chia (add 6 more people to the group)
Martina Kraml / Mary Hess (add 6)
Cyril Orji / Daniela Kastle (add 6)
B. Kwame Assenyoh / Pascale Jung / Gemma T.Cruz (add 5)
Gunda Werner / Nancy Pineda-Madrid / Jeremy Cruz (add 5)
Wolfgang Palaver / Maureen O’Connell / Judy Schaefer (add 5)

9:45-10:30 a.m. Small Group Discussion
People were invited to write words or sentences from discussion on flip chart paper, which capture the flow of conversation. At end of discussion paper was posted on a wall in University Commons room.

10:30-11:00 a.m. Coffee Break; during this time people were invited to read the remarks on the word montages.

11:00-12:30 p.m. Third Session
Session Leader: Mary Ann Hinsdale

11:00-11:15 a.m. TCI TOPIC: The Globe and its theological significance (Wolfgang Palaver)

11:15-11:30 a.m. THEME: How to “celebrate diversity” without ignoring the underside of the history of the Globe (Mary Ann Hinsdale)
Mary Ann bridged the discussion of the I-pole with the Globe-pole (contrast of cultural pride and shame at the personal level with global dynamics of celebrating diversity while ignoring the underside of history).
Mary Ann introduced the timeline: U.S. History of Cultural Achievements and Exclusion. Everyone was invited to add to the timeline.

11:30-11:50 a.m. What would we want to add to add this timeline?
Everyone was given their own marker and invited to add items to the timeline. There may be individuals who will not have anything to contribute
personally or who do not want to contribute anything for one reason or another. This too may be significant.

11:50-12:00 p.m. Review of History, Examination of Conscience: Discuss in large group: What are the destructive and constructive and dynamic patterns that play a role in this history: exclusion, scapegoating, etc.?

12:00-12:30 p.m. A limited number of comments from willing participants offering their reactions to this process or insights they take from this process.

12:30-2:30 p.m. Lunch

1:00 -1:45 p.m. Planning Team and Group Leaders Meet

1:45-2:30 p.m. Liturgy Planning Group

2:30-4:00 p.m. Fourth Session
Session Leader: Brad Hinze

2:30-2:45 p.m. TCI TOPIC: The “We” and Its Theological Significance (Jochen Hilberath)

2:45-2:55 p.m. THEME: Intercultural challenges: We dramatize scenes of conflict in churches and educational settings (Brad Hinze)

2:55-3:15 p.m. In the plenary group, people were invited to collectively (individually and then collectively), identify instances of intercultural conflict in either a pastoral setting or an academic setting.
(1) First everyone is asked to write down on 8 ½ x 11 sheets an answer to this question: What are instances of intercultural conflict that concern you in church or educational settings?
(2) Second, these sheets were placed on the floor and group leaders arranged them together with those with similar instances. This served to establish working groups.
(3) Then everyone was asked to break up into these small groups based on their chosen settings and together develop a dramatic scenario concerning either a situation in the local church or an academic setting.

Rules for dramatic presentation:
• It should be short (five minutes)
• It should be clear and concrete: specify acts or scenes
• The character roles and the dramatic conflict should be well developed.
• As you decide upon your dramatic scenario, you could choose to leave the conflict unresolved; you could show resistance; could dramatize moving beyond conflict.

3:15-4:00 p.m. Small Groups identified and created scenarios of intercultural challenges and conflicts as found in the church (nationally, in dioceses, or in parishes) and in theological education and created dramatic presentations of this with group members showing either the conflict unresolved or ways that the conflict is resolved.

4:00 p.m. Coffee Break

4:15- 5:45 p.m. Fifth Session
Session Leader: Martina Kraml

4:15-5:15 p.m. THEME: Enacting, observing, and reflecting on scenes of intercultural challenges and conflicts in churches and educational settings: What can we learn? What does it reveal? Each group had five minutes to present their scenario and five minutes to offer their reactions. Individuals were invited to offer their reactions after each scenario: (1) What was the experience of those playing in those roles? (2) What is the experience of the audience?

5:15-5:45 p.m. Reflections on Scenarios (led by Martina and Wolfgang Palaver): What patterns of dealing with conflicts play a role in these scenarios? What strategies or practices can we identify for engaging and transforming these dynamics?

6:30 p.m. Liturgy

7:30 p.m. Supper

8:30-9:15 p.m. Planning Team and Group Leaders Meet

9:36 p.m. Train to Grand Central Terminal (arrives 9:55)

10:00 p.m. Planning Team meets in Roosevelt Lobby
Saturday March 1ˢᵗ

8:30 a.m. Breakfast
9:00 a.m., Morning Prayer / Asian tradition

9:15-10:30 a.m. Sixth Session
Session Leaders: (Matthias and Jochen)

9:15-9:22 a.m. The TCI Topic: The “It” in a communicative theological process. (Jochen)

9:22-9:30 .am. THEME: From Implicit to Explicit Theology: Reviewing the gift and challenge of intercultural communication, we discover the “It” (Matthias).

9:30-10:00 a.m. People broke up into the small groups formed on Friday morning and discussed the theme.

10:00-10:20 a.m. Fishbowl: representative of each group seated in a circle--a “fishbowl” and discussed major findings of the group, which was led by Judy Schaefer (in the fishbowl) and Matthias Scharer (outside the fishbowl)

10:20-10:30 a.m. People were invited to offer additional reactions to the Fishbowl discussion

10:30 a.m. Coffee Break

11:00-12:30 p.m. Seventh Session
Session Leaders: (Mary Ann and Brad)

11:00-11:10 a.m. THEME: What insights and learning outcomes from our time together would each of us bring to wider communities (schools, local churches, ethnic communities)? (Mary Ann)

11:10-11:20 a.m. Each individual was invited to write down up to three of their learnings or questions on individual cards.

11:20-11:30 a.m. In the full assembly people were offered an opportunity raise questions, which were written down on poster paper.

11:30-12:15 p.m. Questions were addressed by Matthias Scharer and Jochen Hilberath.
12:15-12:25 p.m.  Last Review: “Pass the Egg”

12:25-12:30 p.m.  Expressions of Gratitude

1:15-2:30 p.m.  Small Group Leaders and Planning Team Meeting and Evaluation
Introduction

A major problem communications people have noticed is the large amount of theoretical input in theology given to future priests, religious, and laity in abstract doses, which they often fail to connect to reality. The Theology and Communications Project (TCP) speaks of the importance of associating theological studies with popular culture, popular religion, and many other aspects of communication studies. The project hopes contextualized cultural/theological studies, that look at our mediated reality, can help youth and adults make their studies contribute to their dream: the hop of Kingdom of God in this world. Often communicators wonder if the Church is at all interested in new cultures spawned by the media and our digital culture. Or is the Church on its own wavelength, continuing with its own teaching methods, unmindful of what is happening globally in a world globally affected by mediated cultures.

On the other hand, attempts have been made by communicators to use the media purely as instruments, to evangelize without a proper theology that explains why media usage is important. We feel it is necessary to develop a vision for communication and media education within the Church. It seems unless theologians wake up to these communication realities and their impact on our ministry, media will always remain an outsider in the Church. The TCP proposes to have an on-going dialogue between theology and communications all over the world.

Background

For the last 25 years, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Communications (CICS) at the Pontifical Gregorian University (PUG), Rome, has been offering an interdisciplinary communication studies program. Some professors at the CICS, with a team of international theologians and communicators, have been trying to develop links between the discipline of theology and communication studies. The eight very enriching Cavalletti Conferences, held on the outskirts of Rome from 1981, have resulted in some theology professors thinking about the interplay between theology and communications. Subsequent conferences in different parts of the world have resulted in the publication of a number of books that throw significant light on the various relations between theology and communication.

The TCP Conferences

Many conferences are normally done for a small number of people with each one contributing a paper; one area is usually studied thoroughly. Areas covered include: foundational relation
between theology and communication; contextual theology; popular culture; new media and communications and culture, etc. Unless this relationship with theology and communication and culture is firmly established, the Church’s involvement in communication and media can remain peripheral and even superficial. Every now and then there are theology and communications professors emerging, both quite profound in their disciplines, but often they miss the link between the two disciplines. Hence the need to continuously contribute to the on-going debate on the inter-relations and interaction between these two disciplines by hosting a conference for additional people every 2-3 years; these are carefully documented for future reference by others.

**Conference Themes**

The major themes for these conferences could be the diverse relationships of theology and communication studies. 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 these movements. One could debate (and we should) whether these media serve this dual mission well or whether interpersonal communication would better serve the basic functions of organizational communication and evangelization.

The second recurrent theme, *Theology and Communication*, 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. Without going too much into the topic here, we can observe that these approaches carry the very real risks of people outside their areas of expertise making claims more serious research will not support. Sadly, much wishful thinking characterizes work on both sides of the theology and communication divide. The Cavalletti approach attempts to minimize these difficulties through academic dialogue and partnership.

*Communication in Formation*, another favorite theme, returns to one of the initial motivations for the Cavalletti conferences: How should the Church prepare future ministers in terms of communication in the contemporary world? Clearly, communication forms a central part of any ministry in the Church. What roles should rhetoric, interpersonal communication, and media studies play in the formation of clergy and lay ministers? Vatican II and the Pontifical Council for Social Communication asked for serious study of this issue, as have the Vatican Congregation for Seminaries and various national conferences of bishops. The Cavalletti approach consists of preparing materials, for example, books on fundamental theology, ecclesiology, moral theology, which can inform seminary classes without adding other courses to an already-crowded set of requirements.
There is also strong agreement about the importance of doing a contextual theology rather than an abstract, universalized version that ignores culture. The cultural context in which one theologizes is a point of intersection between theology and communication since the latter both expresses and creates cultures.

Communication’s main point of intersection with theology comes in pastoral theology. Cinema and media literacy courses have long been used in training people for ministry. Hence the conferences should 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 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 new forms of communication, the new digital media. A broad historical perspective is important since previous stages of communication (orality and literacy) do not disappear; they coincide with, and overlap, the new modes of communication. This raises more questions than it can answer about the impact new media developments will have on faith and culture. The revolutionary change one can see in young students points to a huge impact that needs to be understood so the Church can adequately respond in an effective pastoral manner.

Previous Conferences

From 1984 to 1997, there have been eight Cavalletti conferences, as well as two Cavalletti-like conferences in the United States, each focused on aspects of the theology and communication conversation.

1983 Cavalletti I: Theology and communication: general approaches.

1984 Cavalletti 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 Cavalletti III: Philosophy and communication. Objectives: to examine approaches to communication philosophy (philosophy of language, explorations of meaning) as a foundation for seminary courses attuned to the role of communication.
1988 Cavalletti IV: *Moral theology and communication*. Does the media world have an impact on moral theology? How might moral theologians take advantage of media products or the work of communication scholars?

1988a Marquette University *Conference on moral theology and communication*. This follow-up conference addressed the same themes, bringing together additional scholars.

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

1989 Cavalletti 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 conceptions that were new, and new cultural patterns of communication for ecclesiology and for the life of the Church” (Granfield, 1994, p v).

1991 Cavalletti VI: *Foundations for a Theology of Communication*. Objectives here were: (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; and (3) exchange ideas on teaching communication and theology.


1997 Cavalletti VIII: *Media, religion, and popular culture*. How does popular culture express religious images, themes, and sensibilities? [This is the first of the Cavalletti-like conferences, held not at Villa Cavalletti, which the Jesuits had sold, but at another retreat center 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.
**Some Terms Explained**

Theologizing began to be talked about from the early 1970s. This is an attempt to find the meaning of everyday events in the light of Faith, i.e. interpreting Scripture and doctrines in the light of human experience and explaining human experience in the light of Scripture and Tradition (Faith). Its primary presupposition is that God is 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 interaction between the gospel or the Christian message and the realities of today.

The gospel or Christian faith puts questions to the actual situation and, on the other hand, the present realities put questions of faith so the faith itself may be re-interpreted. The content of Christian faith needs continuous interpretation and re-interpretation so 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.

*Communication theology* is understanding, reinterpreting or re-expressing the categories of communication into the very process of theologizing; something like St. Thomas using Aristotle; or Rahner referring to transcendental philosophy. Here we try to say that theology is all about communication. It is more a *methodological approach* to redefine theology. Theological subjects like Trinity, Revelation, Sacraments, Missiology, Ecclesiology, Christology, Catechetics, Liturgy, etc., have strong communication dimensions. These can be linked to communication and taught from that perspective.

*Theology of communication* is to make a theology about communication, its science and process – like a theology of the cross, or theology of liberation. In this, one’s analysis interprets or applies the concepts of communication to the categories of theology.

*Communicative theology* is studying theology from the perspective of communicating it effectively. Often theology is studied as abstract concepts. Here we talk of Theology being made practical and experienced by common folk. 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 other audio-visual aids, or uses vocabularies sensible to modern people to explain theological concepts, it is communicative theology. This can be said to be a kind of inculturation of theology.
Books from Previous Conferences


Rome Conference On Theology And Communication, September 2007

Jacob Srampical: Planning document

For nearly 25 years the Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Communications (CICS) at the Gregorian University has been forging links with the discipline of theology within the university. The very enriching Cavalletti conferences of 1993 and 1997 got theology professors thinking on the interplay between theology and communications. One result of the 1993 Cavalletti conference was New Image of Religious Film, a book edited by John May which energised many others to reflect on the subject.

We think it is time to renew the Cavalletti spirit and to continue exploring this theme of the Church’s involvement in communications. We want to help theology and communications professors deepen their understanding of the inter-connections between theology and communications. A Cavalletti –III?

Therefore, we propose:

**What:** a six-day conference for professors from theology, and communications experts, to present papers and discuss the theme interactively

**When:** 9-14 September 2007

**Where:** in Rome

**Who:** communication and theology professors, formation leadership

**How Many:** 40

A Preference for Rome

For something that affects the Catholic Church so directly, Rome seems the right place. We hope the conference has an impact on the Church and its various Commissions. We would also like the major universities teaching theology, and those involved in formation at higher levels, to become involved in this project.

**Modality**

Participants will be selected to ensure the necessary range of academic areas and cultural backgrounds are present to allow the rich interchange we hope for. We will ask some people to write papers as well as issuing a call for papers; interested persons can send in papers on a chosen issue under the suggested topic. The papers could then be discussed in groups and then in plenary sessions.
Publication

The outcome of this conference would be the publication of a book to stimulate further thinking on these issues of theology and communications. A board will select the articles and publish as a book by a reputed publisher.

Our Team So Far

1. Tadek Lewicki (dean, faculty of communications, Salesianum)
2. Tom Rochford, (Jesuit media co-ordinator)
3. Norman Penn (St Paul’s, webmaster)
4. Giuseppe Mazza (professor of theology and communications, Gregorian University)
5. Jose Palakeel (theology and communications, India)
6. Paul Soukup (Professor, theology and communication, Santa Clara)

Suggested Topic

Rethinking theology and ministry in the light of developments in communication theory and practice (including media) in today’s world.

Introduction

A major problem communications people have noticed is the large amount of theoretical input in theology given to our priests in abstract doses, with which they cannot apply in practical ways. The cultural reality they face is mediated, thoroughly impacted, media influenced. Often communicators wonder if the Church is at all interested in the new culture spawned by the communication and media. Or is the church on its own wavelength, doing her own thing?

On the other hand, a lot of attempts have been made by media people to use the media, following the instrumental aspect of media without a proper theology that explains why media usage is significant. We feel it is important to develop a vision for communication and media education within the church. Unless theologians wake up to the media and its impacts on our ministry, media will always remain an outsider in the Church.

Thus, we feel it is important to have an on-going dialogue between theology and communication studies; the dialogue needs to be strengthened.

This conference would like to give a general overview about the current situation of this on-going dialogue, so it could be possible – at the end – to gain a clearer idea about what topics to deepen in the years ahead. We can consider this first conference as a foundation point to collect
ideas and to open further the path to new research, possibly suggesting the themes for future conferences. Some issues suggested:

- **Connectivity** (Giuseppe Mazza): What is the meaning of “being connected” in the Catholic Church today? What kind of differences could be noticed between a “secular” concept of living, thinking, moving, in a complex, inter-connected reality, and the Christian concept of “staying connected” in faith, love and hope? What kind of connection of belief and faith can be noticed inside the Catholic structures? Is the Church a real “network” in a modern sense? What is the link between the Christian concepts of *communio*, solidarity, participation, and all the secular subjects suggested by the global communication model?

- **Iconography** (Tom Rochford): As soon as you talk about images, you move into a concrete way of thinking and expressing revelation which we often forget with the academic emphasis on abstract definitions. Can we even think of image-making as a legitimate field of theological inquiry? Is a visual language adequate to express the human encounter with the Divine? If we take seriously the emphasis on visual expression, as it has changed our cultural practice today, we need to revisit the long history of artists expressing Revelation and re-examine our presuppositions.

- **“Natural” Sacramentality and Communication**: (Norman Pena)

- **From the Center to the Periphery**: (Tadek Lewicki)

- **Communication within contexts** (Paul Soukup): contrast with hierarchical style of communication. communicating inside the Church and outside

- **Teaching a Communication-oriented Christianity**: (Jacob Srampickal): how do people involved in formation see communication? What has been done and what should be done? Seeing the seminarian, or person-in-formation, as a communicator: how does he or she discover their own voice? The perspective of communication, with its emphasis on responding to an audience, changes the whole approach of preaching and pastoral practice. Long before considering any use of technology of communication, there are fundamental personal considerations that should shape the person preparing for ministry, especially since the persons he or she will be addressing will be influenced and shaped by a culture of communication.

- **Images and theology** (Jose Palakeel): how images are working in tandem with words to make sense, and how it has an impact on theological epistemology (meaning making). On the epistemology of the multi-media communication and its impact on theologizing.
Ariccia Conference: List Of Participants & Topics

1. Carlos Coupeau
Communication, Spirituality and Bologna Process

2. Norman Melchor Pena, SSP
Elements of a Theology for the Instruments of Social Communication

3. Joseph Palakeel
Theologizing in the Multimedia Culture: Towards a Communication Theology

4. Paul Soukup
Teaching Communication and Theology

5. Norman Tanner
Inter Mirifica (Vatican II): Document, Implementation and Future

6. Jacob Srampickal, SJ
Contextual Theology is an Attempt at Communicating Theology: Formation Attempts

7. Marie Gannon, FMA
Social Communications: Secular Teaching and Church Teachings in the Moral Standards of Communication – Some Common Ground

8. Basilio G. Monteiro
The Language of New Media: Some Theological Reflections

9. José M. Galvan
ICT and The Eternal Beauty of Truth

10. Frances Forde Plude
Moving Toward Communication Theology

11. Giuseppe Mazza
Communicating God, Communicating Like God: The Trinitarian/Incarnational Principle as a Global Communication Analogy

12. László Lukác
The Triune God as Source and Fundament of All Human Communication: A Sketch of Communicative Theology
13. Maria Way  
Formation and Location

14. Joseph Faniran  
Communication and Theology in Africa: Towards Becoming Partners in Dialogue

15. Joan-Andreu Rocha Scarpetta  
A Comparative Approach to the Theology of Communication in Christianity and Islam

16. Jim McDonnell  
The Role of Media Education in Ministerial Formation

17. Francis Coffey  
Words Are Not Enough: Immediacy in Communication Drives Renewal of Teaching on Revelation

18. Miriam Diez I Bosch  
Towards a Church Communication Policy: The Case of Spanish Bishop’s Conference

19. Christine Muggeridge  
Toward the Development of a Theology of Communications in John Paul II; Excellence in the Communication of the Faith as Exemplified in the Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in America

20. Msgr. Lucio Ruiz  
Finding a Theological Base for Communications

21. José M. de Mesa  
Communicating “Revelation-Faith” With Culture in Mind

22. Dr. Thomas A. Bauer  
Kerygma and Construction of Sense: Communicative Competence as a Key Concept of a Communicological Interpretation of Ministry

23. Robert A White, SJ  
Some Current Challenges Facing Discussions of the Theology of Communication

24. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD  
Communication Challenges of a ‘New Culture’
25. Peter Malone
Theology as a Fine Art

26. Lewicki Tadek
Communication as a Relationship Between Church, World and Culture

27. Anna Maria Yvenez
Ariccia Conference: Abstracts Of All Papers

1. Carlos Coupeau

*Communication, Spirituality and Bologna Process*

“Excellent communicator,” “able to communicate the mission,” and expressions like this appear ever more often in job descriptions published by Catholic journals in English, like *America* and *The Tablet*. Not only with communicative skills, the curriculum that an international body of students will choose at the *Instituto di Spiritualità* of the *Pontificia Università Gregoriana* will have to reckon with communication and cultural theory in the future. This paper chooses to make a start and meet that challenge for our conversation by submitting to discussion an example of curriculum transformation. Methodologically, it draws the concepts of the “subject” from communication theory after ideology criticism and redefines the task of Spirituality accordingly. Then, it introduces the student-centered Bologna process of learning and particularly brings *competence* and *performance* to the focus through six academic profiles to which communication skills constitute a transversal dimension.

2. Norman Melchor Pena, SSP

*Elements of a Theology for the Instruments of Social Communications*

This text examines the elements of a theology for the instruments of social communication as read in the Church documents *Inter Mirifica, Communio et Progressio* and *Aestatis Novae*. As instruments of secular reality, the instruments of social communication can also be instruments of grace. They are gifts of God - *diaconia* of truth - that achieve their saving significance in their participation of making God’s truth become flesh. Films, plays, television series and written resources are cited throughout as paradigms.

A communication hermeneutics is presented identifying two complementary nodes of understanding communication: process and semiotics. While the former emphasizes the transmission of messages and analyses made on communication as effective or ineffective, the latter focuses on the creation of meanings on what is transmitted, and the analyses made in terms of reading. The paper links them both with the attitude of the Church towards communication that thus has given shape to the documents cited. The paper reads the documents, identifies the theological elements inherent in them and groups them in three: 1) truth, *communio*, mission; 2) spiritual contribution of the people of God to the instruments of communication of which conscience and its formation is vital; and 3) understanding communication. As part of the saving mystery, these instruments are ordained for *communio et progressio*, for communion and progress of the people of God with themselves, with others and with God.
3. Joseph Palakeel

*Theologizing in the Multimedia Culture: Towards a Communication Theology*

According to the emerging cultural studies approach to communication (vis-à-vis instrumental approaches), the media are more than just tools/instruments of transmission; they also signify a specific state of mind, habit of thinking and mode of self-expression. Each media age – from orality, writing, print, audio-visual to digital – has a corresponding mind-set and consciousness. The “language of sound” (ancient poems and epics), the “language of the alphabet” (printed texts) and the “language of electricity” (audio-visual communication) have different vocabulary, syntax, and logic. Naturally, philosophy and theology of each media age are affected. Today, convergence of technologies (digitization) has rendered mediated communication synergistic and synaesthetic, making it possible for sound, image, and text to work in tandem to create and convey meaning. This has crucial epistemological and semantic implications for theologizing. The present-day theology originated in the print culture (previous media age) and, consequently, exhibits the mindset of literate/textual communication. To make sense in the multimedia age, theology must match the state of mind of the current media culture. This paper is an inquiry into the shape of theology in the digital age.

4. Paul Soukup

*Teaching Communication and Theology*

A media ecology approach allows a better integration between theology and communication, either as a unit in an existing course or as a stand-alone course. Teachers can further borrow an approach from catechetical instruction and highlight the communicative aspects of theology by presenting the Christian collection, cult, creed, community, and code as broad areas of study. The presentation shows how each of these depends on communication and how teachers can use the media ecology approach to introduce students to relevant literature and habits of thought. KEYWORDS: communication, theology, media ecology, orality, and literacy, religious expression.

5. Norman Tanner

*Inter Mirifica (Vatican II): Document, Implementation and Future*

The text for the talk is the section (pp. 93-118) on *Inter Mirifica* in the speaker’s recent book, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica* (Paulist Press, 2005). The section considers (1) how the council came to compose the decree (2) analysis of the contents of the decree (3) reception of the decree since Vatican II (4) some considerations for the future. Tanner presented a short summary of the four sub-sections of the book and will then invited comments and discussion by the participants.
6. Jacob Srampickal, SJ

*Contextual Theology is an Attempt at Communicating Theology: Formation Attempts*

Looking at concepts like culture, inculturation, incarnation, etc, and backed by the Vat II’ *Ad Gentes, Sacrosanctum Concilium* and other related documents on local theologies and inculturation and Lonergan’s ideas of communicating theology, the author highlights how contextualized theology is an attempt at communicating theology. Drawing from his own personalized doing of theology and theories of communication, he concludes, India’s *dalit* theology, a contextualized regional theology following earlier versions like liberation theology, black theology etc, helps future priests relate in depth with *dalits*, the poorest, and the untouchables in society. He concludes by suggesting how theological formation can be made more communicative.

7. Marie Gannon, FMA

*Social Communications: Secular Teaching and Church Teachings in the Moral Standards of Communication – Some Common Ground*

Is there common ground between indicators for good communication in the secular reality and good communication in the Church? This is the question at the basis of this presentation. It is part of the foundational work for the doctoral thesis, whose core Dtsa Christine Mugridge already presented for this Study Seminar. This topic seems to be very important so establishing the understanding that the Church did not copy standards and methodology for excellence in communications from the secular communication sciences, but has consistently, even before the development of this field, proposed and implemented these standards and methodology with varying degrees of success. In this editorial commentary regarding part of Christine Mugridge’s Doctoral Thesis, this paper presents two areas: the historical development of the teachings found in the secular science of social communications in the first section, and then, in the second section, the historical development of the Church’s teachings in this field, prior to the contributions of John Paul II.

8. Basilio G. Monteiro

*The Language of New Media: Some Theological Reflections*

This paper examines the language of the digital media, simultaneously characterized by words, sounds and images, which shape in the user of this digital media a different, sense of self, of the other, and of God, from non-user of digital media. Language is the keystone of human achievement and the essence of humanness; language is the means to conceive the understanding of self, other and God (Hertzler); language is the basis of human spiritual development; it is a vehicle of relationship with the other and God. Digital media provide another platform for us to communicate with meanings, and to tap further into our need to make symbols – animal
symbollicum (Cassirer). Further, the language of the digital media forces the users to re-examine concepts of mediation, telepresence, multi-location, and community. Traditionally Catholic Theology is constructed on the synthesis of Hebraism and Greek philosophy; the language of the digital media is challenging the theology founded in the Greek pre-suppositions and Hebraic thought. The theological reflections borrow from Karl Rahner’s Theology of Symbol, Karl Barth’s “who talks, and whence comes the talk” as commented by Graham Ward, Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of proclamation, and Jacques Ellul’s theology of icon. This study proposes that the language of digital media negotiates mediation, telepresence, and community, in other words, understanding of self, the other, of God, and relationship with these in a personal manner, in a decentralized digital context. The notion of God itself is undergoing a metamorphosis in the language of digital media.

9. José M. Galvan

*ICT and The Eternal Beauty of Truth*

The aim of this paper is to underline some aspects of modern Information and Communications Technology (ICT) that can give the opportunity to rediscover, at a cultural level, some aspects of the Christian Revelation. The paradigm-shift between modernity and post-modernity is seen as the key for rediscovering the relational dimension of mankind, that includes the sharing of the intentional objectives of intellect and free will, including not only the spiritual dimension but also the physical one. This new relational paradigm coincides with the finality of ICT. The transcendental foundation of this relational paradigm is founded on the Trinitarian doctrine of the Missions, which includes the material dimension of Creation into the Intra-trinitarian Dialogue.

10. Frances Forde Plude

*Moving Toward Communication Theology*

This paper explores the growth of analytical frameworks currently helping theologians to engage communication studies (more systematically than in the past) as they elaborate the conceptual meaning of faith. This also allows communication and cultural studies scholars to engage with the perspectives of theologians. Such engagement can help theological insights inform and enhance a digital culture rather than appearing to be anachronistic within the culture. Also offered: specific examples of the growth of Communication Theology content, methodologies, and some concerns and difficulties as we look through this lens or engage communication as a hermeneutical principle. Recommendations are offered.
11. Giuseppe Mazza

*Communicating God, Communicating Like God: The Trinitarian/Incarnational Principle as a Global Communication Analogy*

Aware of the fact that theological reflection always focused special attention on the “way of the Trinity” and on the mystery of the Incarnation as keys to interpreting human and divine-human communication, this paper will propose a theological understanding of communication from the Trinitarian and Incarnational perspectives. The article especially insists on the analogical principle that balances and synchronizes both ecclesiastical/pastoral communicative action and the globality of God’s (Trinitarian and incarnate) self-communication, as a main concept for understanding and stimulating every operative pastoral dimension.

12. László Lukács

*The Triune God as Source and Fundament of All Human Communication: A Sketch of Communicative Theology*

The research in the theology of the Holy Trinity has much in common with communication theories. The main points of this “new theology” are as follows:

- the loving communion of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is the source and final goal of the whole created universe
- revelation is the self-communication of God who is love
- incarnation, cross and resurrection are the peak-point of the history of salvation
- the Church is the Sacrament of Salvation
- the history of salvation is coextensive with human history, with the final goal of reaching the loving communion of the Holy Trinity.

Though communication and communion are non-theological concepts they stand in the middle of recent theological considerations. There are promising initiatives to elaborate a theology of communication, and to create a communicative theology. This argumentation is structured in three steps:

*First step:* Communication within the immanent Trinity (“ad intra”)

*Second step:* The “ad extra” work of the economic Trinity

1. Revelation as divine-human communication
2. Divine-human communication as sacramental interchange
3. The climax of revelation: Jesus Christ the Symbol of God
4. The church as sacrament of salvation and communion of the people of God
Third step: the possible impact of a communicative theology for church and society

13. Maria Way  
*Formation and Location*

This paper seeks to follow the development of Vatican documents on communication and media and to consider whether all that can be done is being done regarding the formation of religious and lay people. Is the formation they receive sufficient and suitable to enable them to spread the Church’s message in the best manner possible? The paper will use empirical evidence and Vatican documents to answer these thorny questions.

14. Joseph Faniran  
*Communication and Theology in Africa: Towards Becoming Partners in Dialogue*

The Fathers of the first African Synod made the building of an enculturated Church the major task of the Church in Africa in the third millennium. But long before then, the African theologians had appropriated the term inculturation to describe the thrust of their theology. Yet, they pay little or no attention to the issue of social communication, its technologies, and the attendant cultural changes. When they do, their attention is on the interpersonal or group level of social interaction, leaving out the mass communication. This presentation, therefore, makes a case for the need for communication and theology to become partners in dialogue in the life and mission of the Church so that the project of an enculturated Church may be realized in Africa.

15. Joan-Andreu Rocha Scarpetta  
*A Comparative approach to the Theology of Communication in Christianity and Islam*

The paper is focussed on Theology and communications and the meeting points between them. A first introductory part presents the focal characteristics of the Christian theology of communication. The central part of the essay defines the main features of a Muslim theology of communication and its specific implications in the modern understanding of communication, public opinion, and inter-religious dialogue from a Muslim perspective. The final part of the paper offers a comparative approach to Christian and Islamic theologies of communication as a ground for a better understanding of the two religious traditions from a communicative, intercultural and inter-religious perspective.
16. Jim McDonnell

The Role of Media Education in Ministerial Formation

For over thirty years there has been a struggle to introduce what can be broadly termed 'media education' into ministerial formation. Unfortunately, it is often seen as simply a means of protecting students against the media, or as a marginal topic in pastoral practice, or even dismissed as irrelevant to 'real life' pastoral practice. This paper, drawing on the author's practical experience, attempts to uncover some of the fundamental challenges raised by engaging in a study of the media and offers some perspectives on how 'media education' and the study of media culture is related to ministerial formation in general.

17. Francis Coffey

Words Are Not Enough: Immediacy in Communication Drives Renewal of Teaching on Revelation

For its media and communicative aspects, fundamentalism presents challenges for the development of the theology of revelation. The direct contact --- with God, with the righteous life, with truth --- claimed by fundamentalists --- concerns communication involving iconic signs. Pietri (2005) has shown that communication is part of the teaching in Dei Verbum that the saving fullness of Christ is revealed in deeds as well as words (2005). Media favours the iconic process that figures in the communicative power of deeds. The article explores whether there can be a theology of communications based on an analogy between media’s iconic capacity and the structure of revelation as deeds and words. If the iconic was integrated with other communicative capacities, Church media could develop practice that meets the felt need of fundamentalists and offers correctives to their reductionism by honouring revelation more fully.

18. Miriam Diez I Bosch

Towards a Church Communication Policy: The Case of Spanish Bishop’s Conference

Abstract: The paper aims to present Church communication policy from the perspective of identity and mission. By stating what constitutes an efficient communication’s strategy within the Church, the essay underlines the weak points and the possibilities of communicating from an institutional point of view, describing the simultaneous action between internal and external publics in order to communicate its essence. The text studies the case of the Spanish Bishop’s Conference as an example, highlighting the lack of a Public Relation’s policy in the Church. The final part suggests some best practices to construct an effective communication policy in the Church.
19. Christine Muggeridge

*Toward the Development of a Theology of Communications in John Paul II; Excellence in the Communication of the Faith as Exemplified in the Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in America*

The organic development of a more humanist approach to the field of secular research in social communications, coupled with the Church’s growing understanding of her relationship with the culture of the media and the mediated culture, coincided with the “mediated” pontificate of Pope John Paul II. His theological perspectives were developed into a theology of communication with a pastoral emphasis. This last conclusion is indicated in the sample text, *Ecclesia in America* through the Pontiff’s proposal of a theoretical and strategic plan for the communication of the faith which incorporates excellence in communications management, principles, method, and theory.

20. Msgr. Lucio Ruiz

*Finding a Theological Base for Communications*

From its own beginning, the Church has used all the available means of communication in every moment of history. In our times it has shown a big interest in using media for transmitting the faith. The Church has been also active in reflecting about media, illuminating their pastoral benefits, their limits, and their possible risks. However, the Church has been much less aware of the theological dimensions and the divine roots of every form of communication; the constituting elements and the mere possibility of communication are rooted in its theological origin. The ignorance of this profound reality leads to a reductive, instrumental/mediatic vision of communication, impeaching a correct understanding of its true dimension, its importance in the Church, and the place it would have to have as a theological-rooted expression of God’s life.

21. José M. de Mesa

*Communicating “Revelation-Faith” With Culture in Mind*

The paper proposes a methodology of communicating the foundational reality of revelation-faith in a culturally meaningful way. We first note the primary importance of both revelation-faith and culture in theological understanding and communicating. Then the use and advantages of “theological constants” as a theological methodology capable of ensuring rootedness in the culture of a people and fidelity to the Judeo-Christian tradition are presented. With constants in mind, the enculturated theologies of revelation-faith in the Bible, in neo-scholasticism and in personalist theology are examined. After discerning the theological constants present in these theologies and knowing how these were expressed differently, these same constants are used as a guide to articulate a Filipino theology of revelation-faith.
22. Dr. Thomas A. Bauer

*Kerygma and Construction of Sense: Communicative Competence as a Key Concept of a Communicological Interpretation of Ministry*

When we find ourselves involved in a communication society, and realizing that we are part of a huge and rapid cultural change, any attempt to define what a life in faith or a religious life is, under the conditions of a media-, communication, knowledge, or (even) event-society, needs to be precluded by thoughts on the paradigmatic meaning of communication (in the context of media, in a context of societal organization of knowledge and in an event-environment) in relation to church-life as well as all things which could define church life as a special version of communication. That means, we have to rethink not only the ministry, we have to rethink - in relation to communication – all moments that constitute church-life, which is the system (community) of belief – both the practical side (culture of faith) and the scientific or logical side (theology of faith). The outcome of the analysis is: since communication’s rationality is (due to the paradigm of difference) to generate diversity of meaning, the rationality of faith is to generate diversity of communication (communication faith).

23. Robert A White, SJ

*Some Current Challenges Facing Discussions of the Theology of Communication*

This paper argues that the Catholic Church, in many parts of the world, is losing its capacity to stimulate a deeper communication with the self-revealing God. One evidence of this complex phenomenon is the massive rejection of the Church, in regions such as Europe, as a significant source of religious inspiration. For Christianity, a religion of communication, of crucial importance is a theology of communication which leads to sites of communication with God in contemporary cultures. Increasingly less attractive is the theology of communication which leads people to attempt to find communication with God in defensive rationalizations about religious matters proposed as the means of preserving the internal integrity of one’s belief, in doctrinal propositions developed by Church theologians, in ritualistic rubrics, in acts of adherence to the authority of the Church, in an understanding of symbol and sacrament which focuses on the legalistic obligation and in the detailed prescriptions of the law of the Church which are taken as evidences of God’s will. Increasingly attractive is a theology of communication which encourages finding God directly in the people and events of one’s daily life, in the dialogue and discernment of religious experience of lay people in Christian communities, in the charismatic experiences of the new Catholic movements, in the symbols and experiences of contemporary popular culture, in highly personal religious experiences, and in individual (non-institutional) appropriation of fundamentalist tenets. While the first mentioned theology of communication encourages a rather solipsistic withdrawal into one’s own rationalizing, the latter places great emphasis on communicative outreach, the use of media, dialogue with other religions and openness to new communication technologies.
24. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD

*Communication Challenges of a ‘New Culture’*

The “New Culture”, with new ways of communicating, new technologies, a new language and new psychology, demands also a theological re-thinking of our communication approaches and activities. We should learn from history and dispose ourselves to embrace the “New Culture” in the spirit of Communication Theology and a genuine spirit-filled approach to modern pastoral and evangelizing communication.

25. Peter Malone

*Theology as a Fine Art*

This is the title of a pamphlet by Monika Hellwig given to the American Theological Association in 1983. The theological method is: *Contemplation, Sharing, Reflection*. Using this method for an experience of pastoral Christology, we can look at the same Gospel episode as dramatized in the movies of the 20th century. We respond to different iconic presentations, different Christologies, different ‘spiritualities’ -- sharing these contemplative responses, building bridges of sharing, and appreciation of others’ perspectives. This process becomes a starting point for greater reflection and understanding of the person of Jesus. The example: the woman taken in adultery in Intolerance (1916), King of Kings (1928), The Greatest Story ever Told (1965), Jesus of Nazareth (1977), The Last Temptation of Christ (1988), Jesus (1999), The Gospel of John (2003).

26. Lewicki Tadek

*Communication as a Relationship Between Church, World and Culture*

“When the thief becomes a holy and the banquet helps forget the sorrow…. performative rituals and the quest for identity and preservation of culture.” The presentation and analysis of two rituals, the antique one, called “Gayassa”, from the Chaldean liturgical tradition of the Holy Week, and “Bocadu”, a younger ritual of the Ash Wednesday from St Tome y Principe Islands, could help the understanding of the human quest for identification with one’s own religious culture, through transgression which the performance theatre can offer. From one side there is a problem of the lost roots which are re-discovered and from the other side the will to preserve basic elements of the cultural – religious tradition, especially within the extreme socio-political situations. The performance studies approach could help to evaluate the vital input of the popular, community theatre into the religious communication.

27. Anna Maria Yvenez
Arricia Theology And Communication Conference, September 2007, Rome

Summary by Thomas Rochford, SJ

[The conference brought together 27 people, most of them university professors. The largest number of participants came from Rome; others came from Chile, Philippines, England, Hungary, Austria, United States, India, Nigeria, and Tanzania. Nine of the group were theologians and eighteen were communicators, although many of the latter have also studied theology.]

Summary of the Conclusions We Reached

Theology and communication are distinct disciplines, each with its own methodology that must be respected. Inviting experts from the two disciplines to come together for five days of rich conversation highlighted several significant points of intersection between them. Theology has something to say about communication, just as communication has something to say about theology. More than that, there are elements of communication within theology, and communication can do a theological reflection on some of its own phenomenon.

1. There was serious debate over where one should ground communication in systematic theology. Some said the intercommunion within the Trinity was the source and model of human communication; others held one should start with the Spirit leading people to the Son who communicates the Father. The basic question is whether human communication is an echo/reflection of Trinitarian communication or whether it is something distinct whose autonomy should be respected. There was a strong agreement about the importance of doing a contextual theology rather than an abstract, universalized one that ignores culture. The cultural context in which one theologizes is a point of intersection between theology and communication since the latter both expresses and creates cultures.

2. We discussed ecclesiology a great deal, especially the place of the Church in a post-Modern world that is quickly being reshaped by the new digital media in which technology is affecting how people relate to each other and how they think. The Church faces a choice of remaining within its comfort zone of long-developed ways of communicating with established groups, or of entering the broader cultural discourse, which means engaging a media culture, as John Paul II did. We cannot conceptualize a dichotomy of “us” within the Church and “them” outside, the new digital barbarians; even active Church members are being influenced by popular culture. The Church needs a significant re-orientation to address its own members adequately as well as to engage in dialogue with the broader culture. The Church needs to be willing to “translate” its message into terms that resonate with people formed by the new popular culture.
The political question of communication within the Church was another area of discussion. The question is, who controls communication, who are the gatekeepers? In past times control resided in Church leadership, but the new technologies have opened other possibilities for much wider participation. The contribution of lay Catholic communication experts will be important, provided Church leaders invite them to contribute.

3. Within the discipline of communication, the conversation stressed the importance of looking at communication as a broad, multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes interpersonal communication, cultural analysis, preaching, story-telling, music and oral presentations -- not just media or technology. The earlier instrumental approach—simply using technology unreflectively as tools—was soundly rejected; the Church has tended to follow this approach which minimizes the importance of communication.

4. Communication’s main point of intersection with theology comes in pastoral theology. Cinema and media literacy courses have long been used in training people for ministry. Now we highlighted 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 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 new forms of communication, the new digital media. A broad historical perspective is important since previous stages of communication, (orality and literacy), do not disappear; rather, they coincide with, and overlap, the new modes of communication. The group raised more questions than it could answer about the impact new media developments will have on faith and culture. The revolutionary change one can see in young students points to a huge impact that needs to be understood, so the Church can adequately respond in an effective pastoral manner.

5. A significant challenge to greater collaboration between the two disciplines comes from the fact that in many seminaries and institutions preparing people for ministry, pastoral theology itself is not given sufficient attention. Homiletics courses may not be offered, or might just focus on content, but not on an awareness of what the Word of God has to say to a specific people in a specific cultural context, or on the homilist as communicator (in terms of self-awareness, oral quality, believability, etc.). If the seminary does not even
take homiletic training seriously, then it probably will not care about developing a communication competency in its students in other areas.

6. Participants saw a great benefit from the interactive method of this conference, which stands apart from the typical academic conference in which only a few experts give presentations. Everyone at Ariccia presented a paper which was discussed in greater detail in small group sessions and then in summary form with the whole group. The discussion between academicians coming from the two diverse disciplines was very lively and insightful. Some practical results are the decision to publish the papers of the conference, and to create a Reader that collects key articles to help people, especially those preparing individuals for ministry, to understand the intersection of these two disciplines.
Communication Theology Conferences In India


“Toward a Communication Theology”

Jan 1-5, 2005
Ruhalaya Theological College, Ujjain. M.P.
28 Deans of Theology and 7 communication experts
30 Catholic Seminaries/Communication Centers represented

Publication: 
*Toward a Communication Theology*

“Communicating the Gospel”

Feb 3-6, 2005
Ruhalaya Theological College, Ujjain. M.P.
Biblical scholars and communication experts

Publication: 
*The Bible and Technologies of the Word*
Participants

Robert Schreiter, Catholic Theological Union

From the International Study Commission on Media, Religion & Culture
- Adan Medrano, Executive Director
- David Morgan, Acting Chairman of the Commission
- Frances Forde Plude, Commission Member

Bob Bonnot, Senior Vice President, Religious Affairs, Odyssey TV Network

Hermann Pottmeyer, Visiting Professor, Notre Dame University

Some Assumptions

1. In some ecclesiology approaches (and in most church communication efforts) there is:
   - an (over) emphasis on “top down” messages
   - some lack of respect for the population-at-large and its popular culture and religiosity
   - a tendency to focus on delivery systems and their impact instead of audience-reception analysis

2. There may be (in theology and in church communication) some minimal respect for, and investment in, worship and artistic expression (including media storytelling) as mediating forms of spiritual experience—popular visual piety, the religious imagination, art in worship, etc.

3. Global communication networking provides avenues for sharing and interconnecting developing local theologies (multicultural and often non-Western).

Some Questions

1. If we want to assist religious groups (institutions, leaders, popular religiosity, youth, for example) to re-conceptualize religion and popular culture, are theologians the prime group to work with?
2. If so, what strategies are appropriate a) to overcome the lack of engagement among theologians; and b) to structure a practical plan?

3. What role(s) can the following components play?
   - a name change (to include cultural studies)?
   - symposia (CTSA next year; Boston College; 2001 Symposium)
   - soliciting book proposals
   - providing financial support for book developments
   - developing a model workshop (on-line?) for leadership
   - incorporating current doctoral students at work on media/religion

**Meeting Preparations**

Attached are a few pages to guide our discussion from 10:00am to noon on Saturday. Bob Bonnot has agreed to serve as meeting moderator – to allow us creative wandering while keeping us on track. Our goal is to assess Communication Theology directions to date and strategize about its future development.

Directions have been faxed to you so you can easily reach the Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union (housed in the Margaret Paluch Hall, 5420 South Cornell Avenue.)

The Bernardin Center phone number is (773) 684-1056.

Perhaps all of us may develop our own list of areas of theology and areas of communication / cultural studies where integration is just waiting to be nurtured.

**Follow-up of Chicago Meeting**

Memo to Bob Schreiter:

1. We have contacted the practical theology folks in CTSA and we plan some interaction among these groups at the CTSA convention in San Jose.

2. Adan and I met with Roberto Goizueta in Boston and have a tentative commitment from him for a book.

3. This year’s Communication Theology Seminar (on Friday) will feature Kathryn Tanner to insert cultural studies into our equation.
4. I will – through the enclosed materials and follow-up contacts – organize for some sort of
gathering at CTSA to enlist theologians’ further involvement.

On Wednesday, March 29th, the CTSA panel will gather at the Marriott to organize briefly for
the Communication Theology session.

Bob Bonnot and Mary Hess (respondent) will be there for the RCC 2000 gathering and Kathryn
Tanner will join them. It would be helpful if you could join them too. I will have Bob Bonnot
contact you by E-mail with details in case you can manage it.

Thanks so much, Bob, for your continued significant support.

To: Rev. Robert Schreiter/Catholic Theological Union
From: Frances Forde Plude/Communication Theology project
       Notre Dame College

Bob, the material below is an overview of the Communication Theology project in recent years.
Much has been accomplished.

Listed below are a few pieces of strategy under consideration:

- an international gathering to facilitate theological analysis
- major funding to purchase sabbaticals so theologians could write books
- a specific plan to ensure that theologians truly integrate the new field
- leadership in-service so this becomes part of church policy
- an attempt to integrate cultural studies insights + religious educators
- systematic networking of international doctoral students who are reconceptualizing
  theology through communication studies

**Communication Theology – An Overview**

*By Frances Forde Plude*

**Project Accomplishments**

1. A decade of symposia, held at Gregorian University and CTSA

2. A growing literature
3. Growing awareness and/or involvement by major theologians: Avery Dulles; Edmund Arens; Rick Gaillardetz; Roberto Goizueta; Catherine Hilkert; Elizabeth Johnson; Tom O’Meara; Hermann Pottmeyer; Randy Sachs; Robert Schreiter; etc.

4. Engagement with the international conferences on Media, Religion and Culture (most recently in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh)

5. A meeting of 20 international doctoral students at the Edinburgh conference writing dissertations on theology and communication studies

Planning for Future Challenges

1. There is a need to move from this base to a deeper and more systematic integration of Communication Theology into the body of theological scholarship. This needs to overcome the sense among many theologians that “communication” means primarily “mass media” which many intellectuals see as inimical to scholarship.

In fact, the move is to a digital culture. There is a lot of support for doing this, but most theologians are not sure how to do it. The goal is to start getting some substantive theology books done within the next few years. We hope to move this forward substantively in San Jose.

2. There is a growing awareness of the impact of popular culture on both communication and religious systems. There is a need to incorporate cultural studies into the Communication Theology enterprise.

3. There is a need to write/publish some Communication Theology “classics” (as in liberation theology) that articulate theology with insights from communication studies well integrated into theological thought.

4. Several gatherings could be organized (primarily consisting of theologians, with a few communication scholars/practitioners) to help flesh out conceptual issues to be addressed in the above books.
International Study Commission On Media, Religion And Culture

By Robert A. White, Commission Member

Significant among “think tank” work in the study of media and religion was The International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture. A small group of international and ecumenical scholars and practitioners, the group’s Executive Director was Adán Medrano.

The Commission met with media and religion leaders in Europe, Africa, South America, Asia, and Australia. The group planned a series of books to articulate the ideas and insights gathered. Listed below are excerpts from the Commission brochure.

Popular culture is bubbling with images and stories of religion. Yet traditional televangelism and broadcast worship services have only limited audience appeal. Religious leaders and scholars therefore ask:

- What is the nature of religion in this media-dominated age?
- How should the institutions of religion play a role?

The International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture is a group of scholars and practitioners committed to addressing these and related questions. Members of the Commission (such as Stewart Hoover, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Jolyon Mitchell, Lynn Clark, Roberto Goizueta, Peter Malone, Robert White, S.J., Mary Hess and others) represented scholarship in Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia and the U.S. Activities of the commission include: conferences, seminars and consultations; commissioning of specific research; cooperative support of related research projects; cooperation in related conferences, projects, and initiatives; support for media products of various kinds; and preparation and presentation of findings in a variety of forms and contexts. The Commission posted plans, resources, ideas, and findings on its Website.

Four Core Issues

In what ways can we say that the media have come to occupy the spaces occupied by religion traditionally?

- What religious functions do media fulfill?
- What are the new forms of spirituality that are emerging?
- Where/how is transcendence found or experienced?
- What are the means of meaning-making?

What is the relationship of religious authority to modes of symbolic practice?
• Is there a necessary or historic relationship between authority and certain modes of symbolic practice, such as the linear modes?

• Are the visual modes inherently threatening to authority? If so, what kinds of authority? Where? Whose?

• What are the prospects of religious authority and its practices of legitimation as a result of these conditions?

How must we re-think the relationship between religion and the media?

• How does the new situation call into question former dichotomies of sacred and profane spheres, “good” vs “bad” media, etc.?

• How does the new situation call into question the traditional “instrumental” understanding of media which has supported many media production activities of the churches; media reform activism of various kinds; and the so-called “media literacy” movement?

What does this new situation imply about epistemology?

• Does it call for new epistemologies?

• Is the new situation indicative of changed epistemologies in general? That is, that the whole way we think about reality has now been altered.

• What is the relation of media practice to epistemology (i.e., are the postmodernists right in claiming that the changed epistemology of the postmodern is a consequence of the media)?

The Christianity and Electronic Culture Listserv

“The Christianity and Electronic Culture List Serve,” called XMC, was a Spanish/English language e-mail discussion group about the contextualization of Christian faith in the new media culture and the implications for Christian faith and practice. Supported by the Study Commission, the list serve was moderated by Rev. Dr. Peter Horsfield. Subscribers to the list serve received regular e-mail messages that discussed and debated key questions, exchanged resources, and announced news of big or small experiments in the areas of electronic media and faith activities. The list serve was an activity of the Electronic Culture Research Project within
the Commission for Mission of the Uniting Church in Victoria, Australia, with help from JM Communications in Houston, Texas.
Center For Media, Religion, And Culture At The University Of Colorado, College Of Media, Communication, And Information

From Wikipedia:

The Center for Media, Religion, and Culture is a research center in the University of Colorado's College of Media, Communication and Information, that aims at cultivating knowledge and promoting research on the representation and interpretation of religion in popular media, both inside and outside the U.S. The center was founded in 2006 by Professor Stewart M. Hoover, of the Journalism and Mass Communication faculty known for his work on popular media and religions. In addition to hosting several international conferences that address current issues in media, religion and culture, the center offers fellowship programs for domestic and international scholars interested in conducting research on related subjects.

The Center takes on various projects with research fellows to explore religion and media from varied angles and through new, developing theoretical frameworks. The Center aims to bring together scholars, professionals and the larger public to explore the variety of ways media and religion influence one another and our daily lives.

History

The idea to establish a center for media, religion and culture was introduced by Paul S. Voakes in 2003 when the dean saw Hoover's success in attracting support from the Lilly Endowment, Inc, to conduct research on media and religion. What started as a research collaboration between Hoover, his graduate students, and his colleagues in Europe, began to develop into something bigger.

In November 2004, Hoover, with the assistance of Lynn Schofield Clark, wrote a proposal for the establishment of the center. They identified project areas that later became the center's foci. Research works remained to be the foundational activity for the center. In addition, the center seeks support for a Senior Faculty and Post-Doctoral Fellowship Program that helps to shape ongoing research and scholarly projects in the field of media, religion, and culture. The center also holds lectures, seminars and formal conferences, both independently and in cooperation with other institutions, such as New York University and the University of Southern California, in an effort to bridge the academy with religious communities, industries, and the wider public.
In addition, the Center acts as the global secretariat for the International Conferences on Media, Religion and Culture that started in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1994; it has become the prominent conference in the field.

The Center was officially inaugurated in 2006. During the same year, Clark left University of Colorado at Boulder and, subsequently, the Center, to become Assistant Professor at the School of Communication at the University of Denver. She remains a close collaborator of the Center and maintains a good relationship with Hoover.[8] In 2007 Journalism and Mass Communication hired a new Assistant Professor, Nabil Echchaibi,[9] who specializes in identity politics among young Muslims in the Arab world and in diaspora. He is now the associate director of the Center.[10]

Activities

Research Projects

Some of the projects mentioned below took place prior to the establishment of the Center, but associated with its development and continuation.

Finding Religion in the Media, 2010 – Present

The Center for Media, Religion and Culture is currently undertaking a study funded by the Ford Foundation on the ways that religion is represented, experienced, and understood through the media today. The project, entitled “Finding Religion in the Media,” explores the extent to which religious belief, practice, and action—particularly that directed at social reform and social change—can be generated in and through the media sphere.[11]

The “third spaces” concept has been central to the Finding Religion in the Media project. As developed by Hoover and Echchaibi, this concept serves as an interpretive tool to highlight what we call a “thickening” of the religious experience beyond dichotomous definitions of both religion and media categories. Digital spaces have opened opportunities to theorize the production of meaning across hybrid spaces. Digital media reflect and narrativize life experiences and the Center has done so by looking specifically at case studies of the way religion and the religious are articulated and contested online. The research is framed around the novelty of technologies that leads us to adopt a hierarchical indexing of what constitutes an authentic experience of belonging and belief, outside of dichotomies of traditional/modern, physical/digital, and real/proximal embodied experience. The impulse to define how and why we communicate, drawing boundaries between various technological media leads to problematic understandings of complex user identities. The third spaces concept argues that theories of ritual,
religion, media, and communication, benefit from an analysis of how meaning is produced and performed at the borderlines of a complex ecosystem of media ensembles and hybrid spaces.[12]

Muslims in the Mountain West, 2009-2010

This research, supported by a grant from the Social Sciences Research Council, is a joint project of the Center and the University of Colorado’s Center for Asian Studies. It is intended to develop a profile of Muslims and of Islam in the six states of the mountain west. Interviews and site visits will document the life, interests, and culture of this growing community. The outcome will be information useful to media, scholars, and interested members of the public, and products, including a website, a documentary film, and various resources and materials. The grant also supports a series of round table conversations and informational events bringing together scholars of Islam, members of the media, and representatives of the Muslim community. The project also fed into the Center’s conference on Islam and the Media.[13]


Principal Investigator (P.I.): Stewart Hoover; Associate P.I: Lynn Schofield Clark; Research Associates: Diane F. Alters, Joseph G. Champ, Lee Hood, and Henrik Boes. The project resulted in the book Media, Home, and Family (Routledge, 2004), written in collaboration by Hoover, Clark and Alters. The book argued that how families discuss the rules and practices surrounding media use are an important part of how they lay claim to a family identity in the age of reflexive parenting. The Symbolism project also provided the initial research for Hoover's, Religion in the Media Age (Routledge, 2006), Clark's From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural (Oxford U Press, 2003), and supported the development of the edited volume Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media, edited by Hoover and Clark (Columbia U Press, 2002).[14]

Symbolism, Meaning, & the New Media @ Home, 2001-2006

P.I: Stewart Hoover; Associate P.I and Director for Teens and the New Media @ Home: Lynn Schofield Clark; Research Associates: Scott Webber, Christof Demont-Heinrich, Joe Champ, Michele Miles, AnnaMaria Russo, Denice Walker, Monica Emerich, Yuri Obata, Jin Park, and Kati Lustyik. This project provided the funding that supported the completion of Clark's book, From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural (Oxford U Press, 2003/2005 paperback). It also supported the conclusion of Hoover's Religion in the Media Age (Routledge, 2006) and the early research stage of Clark's Parenting in a Digital Age (forthcoming). Moreover, it provided support for the collaborative effort Hoover and Clark engaged in with the Pew Internet & American Life Project to produce the 2004 report, Faith Online.[15][16][17]
Dissertation Fellowship Program in Media, Religion and Culture, 2002-2007

Co-Directors: Stewart Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark; Fellowship Coordinators: Diane Alters, Scott Webber, Monica Emerich. This fellowship program has resulted in two edited volumes: *Religion, Media, and the Marketplace*[18] (Rutgers University Press, 2007) [19]

Media, Meaning and Work, 2006-2010

This research project covers two topics: Men, Masculinity, & Civic Engagement with Stewart Hoover as the P.I., and Youth and Civic Engagement with Lynn Schofield Clark as the P.I. The second project is sub-contracted to the University of Denver. This project provided the funding for the book Hoover is currently writing with his former graduate student at what was previously known as SJMC, Curtis Coats.[20]

Conferences

The Center for Media, Religion and Culture hosts biannual conferences taking on important messages in relation to the subject of Media and Religion. The following are the conferences held at the University of Colorado at Boulder.[21]

Media and Religion: The Global View (January 2014)

The Center’s conference: Media and Religion: The Global View was held at the University of Colorado Boulder on January 9-12, 2014. The conference was designed to explore religion in the 21st century as it relates to media and its global applications and implications. This conference brought together an interdisciplinary community of scholars for focused conversations on emerging issues in media and religion. Each has proven to be an important landmark in the development of theory and method in its respective area and has resulted in important collaborations, publications, and resources for further research and dialogue. Invited speakers included: Pradip Thomas, University of Queensland, Australia; Magali do Nascimento Cunha, Universidade Metodista de São Paulo, Brazil; Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana; and Jane Little, Religious Affairs Correspondent at the BBC World Service and Religion Editor at Public Radio International’s The World.[22]

International Conference on Digital Religion (January 2012)

Digital Religion was held at the University of Colorado at Boulder on January 12-15, 2012.[23] The conference brought together scholars of media and religion and producers of digital religion content from a variety of religious traditions to reflect on the implications of new media on religious practice and meaning-making in modern society. Invited speakers included: Stig
Hjarvard, Department of Film & Media Studies at the University of Copenhagen, Jeremy Stolow, Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University, Montréal, and Heidi Campbell, Department of Communication at Texas A&M University. [24]


The conference engaged a range of questions on the place of Islam within global, regional, national, and local media. It was attended by scholars on Islam and contemporary media, media professionals, activists, and members of NGOs. Featured speakers and presenters included Charles Hirschkind,[25] Professor of Social Cultural Anthropology at University of California at Berkeley, Zarqa Nawaz, Creator of Little Mosque on the Prairie, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation sitcom that chronicles the life of a small Muslim community in a prairie town in Saskatchewan, and Mona Eltahawy, an award-winning syndicated columnist and an international public speaker on Arab and Muslim issues who is based in New York.[26][27]

**ISMRC Conferences**

International Society for Media, Religion and Culture Conference, 2014; Canterbury, England

In August, 2014 the CMRC, in association with the International Society for Media, Religion and Culture (ISMRC) held a conference hosted by Dr. Gordon Lynch from the University of Kent. This conference was held in Canterbury, England.[28]

**References**


3. ^ "The Center for Media, Religion and Culture".


The International Conferences On Media, Religion, And Culture

[The 10th International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture was held in Seoul, Korea from Aug. 1-4, 2016.]

The Ninth International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture was held in Canterbury, UK, from Aug. 4-7, 2014. Keynote speakers included Professor Jonathan Walton (Harvard), author of Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism, and Professor Kathryn Lofton (Yale), author of Oprah: the Gospel of an Icon, with an address also given by the inaugural president of the society, Professor Stewart Hoover (Colorado).

The Eighth International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture was held at Anadolu University in Eskisehir, Turkey, from July 8-12, 2012. It was directed by Dr. Nezih Orhon and featured a post-conference historic and religious sites tour.

The Seventh International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture was held at Ryerson University, Toronto, from Aug. 12-16, 2010. It was directed by Dr. Joyce Smith, and it brought together an international cohort of scholars and producers and featured a series of compelling plenaries.

The Sixth International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture was held at the Methodist University of Sao Paulo from Aug. 11-14, 2008. It was directed by Dr. Magali de Naciemento Cunha and brought together scholars, producers, and activists from over twenty countries.

The Fifth International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture was directed by Alf Linderman (who also directed the first conference in 1994) and Mia Löveheim) and was hosted by the Sigtuna Stiftelsen in Sigtuna, Sweden. The dates were July 6-9, 2006. Attending were over 100 scholars and experts on religion and religious change.

The Fourth International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture took place Sept. 1-4, 2004 in Louisville, Kentucky. It was directed by Dr. John Ferré and co-sponsored by the University of Louisville, the International Study Commission on Media, Religion, and Culture, and the Louisville Institute.

Between the third and fourth CMRC meetings, the University of Jyväskyla, Finland held an important parallel conference titled Sacred Media (July 10-12, 2003), that fit into the goals and continuity of CMRC efforts. Directed by Dr. Johanna Sumiala-Seppänen, this meeting expanded the network of scholars of media and religion through a focus on technology and journalism.
Other international meetings have also been associated with the CMRC series. Among the most prominent was the Tehran International Conference on Religion and Media, held Nov. 8-10, 2005 and co-sponsored by Tehran University and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting University. It was co-directed by Prof. Sayyed Hosseini, Dr. Abosallam Javadi Yeganeh, and Dr. Hamid Abdollahyan.

Books and Publications

THEOCOM Conferences, Santa Clara University

Paul Soukup, S.J., Host

THEOCOM themes have included: Theology and Communication in Dialogue (2012), Changing Models of Communications in the Church (2013), Community in the Digital World (2014), and Religious and Theological Authority in a Digital World (2015), In the World and Yet Not of the World: Ecclesiology in the Digital Age (2016) and Digital Shepherding: Pastoral Theology and Ministry in a Digital Age (2017). Sample items from these conferences are listed below.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Theology and Communications in Dialogue, (1st conference), 2012

Theologians from around the world, and several denominations, will present on “Theology and Communications: In Dialogue” on June 25-27, 2012, at Santa Clara University in San Jose, California. Theologians are encouraged to consider attending. The symposium will be limited to accommodate small group conversations.

Sponsors for the event: the Pontifical Council of Social Communications, Santa Clara University, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Communications Committee.

Presenters will address three themes:

Ecclesiology and Communication: Theological reflection on what communication practices, technologies, and patterns means for the life and identity of the Church.

Communication and Historical Theology: What can we learn from the past about how theology reflected on or made use of communication? Are there particular theological concepts that incorporate communication in one way or another? What might we learn from Augustine, John of Damascus, Jerome, Bernard, John Henry Newman, and others?

Theological Reflection on Digital Communication: How do the new epistemologies and patterns of learning challenge our theological methodologies?

Presenters include:

Rev. Anh Vu Ta is of Vietnamese origin and priest of a German diocese. After pastoral experience in Germany, he entered the Pastoral Communication Program at the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas in Manila. He is now teaching in the same program and a doctoral student at the UST theological faculty with a proposed thesis on "Communication Theology in Intercultural Communication Perspective."
Heidi Campbell is associate professor at Texas A&M University, whose most recent book, *When Religion Meets New Media* (Routledge, 2010) on Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities’ historic perceptions and contemporary use of media technologies.

Nadia Delicata is a lecturer at the University of Malta. Through two research fellowships at the University of Toronto, Dr. Delicata has explored two pertinent themes on the role of the Christian life in the global village: a hermeneutics of digital culture through the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology, and the role of religion in the public sphere through the Centre for the Study of Religion.

Rev. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, is coordinator of the Social/Pastoral Communication Program at the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila and director of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at St. John's University in Bangkok. His most recent publications include Communicating in Community (Logos, Manila, fourth edition, 2009).

Rev. José M. Galvan, professor of moral theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, has collaborated with the ARTS Lab of the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna in Pisa on subjects related to the anthropological implications of research on robotics and technology in general.

Bernd Jochen Hilberath is professor of dogmatic theology and the history of dogma at the University of Tübingen and is director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research. He has been actively involved in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues.


Rev. Richard Leonard, SJ, director of the Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting, is a visiting professor of communications at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome and has lectured at Jesuit Theological College, Melbourne and The Broken Bay Institute, Sydney.

Rev. Franco Lever is a Salesian priest who holds degrees in theology, education and catechetics, and television studies. He is cofounder and dean of the faculty of Sciences of Social Communication of the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome.
Rev. Brian Lucas is the general secretary for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Prior to his work at the ACBC secretariat, Father Lucas was media spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Sydney for 15 years, and has qualifications in law, media and theology.

Jolyon Mitchell is professor of communications, arts and religion and Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Edinburgh. In addition to being a prolific author and lecturer, Dr. Mitchell also has experience in producing and reporting for television and radio.

Rev. Joseph Palakeel, a priest of The Missionary Society of St. Thomas the Apostle, India, holds a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University and a diploma in social communication from the Interdisciplinary Center for Social Communication at the Gregorian.

Matthias Scharer is a professor of practical theology in the fields of catechetics and religious education at the University of Innsbruck, where he leads a research team working on communicative theology. He has lectured widely in Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia on this process and has conducted seminars employing this method.

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome is assistant professor of liturgy, catechesis, and evangelization at the Loyola Institute for Ministry. At Boston College, she worked with Thomas Groome and Jane Regan while earning her doctoral degree in the field of theology and education. Her dissertation is entitled “Digital Media at the Service of the Word: What Does Internet-mediated Communication Offer the Theology of Revelation and the Practice of Catechesis?” (2011).

**First THEOCOM Conference 2012**

**June 25**

7:30 a.m. Breakfast

9:00 a.m. Opening remarks: Archbishop Claudio Celli, president, Pontifical Council for Social Communication

*Ecclesiology and Communication: Theological reflection on what communication practices, technologies, and patterns means for the life and identity of the Church*

9:30 a.m. Presentation: "Communicative Theology” Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Bradford Hinze, & Matthias Scharer

10:00 a.m. Presentation: "Individuation and Communion: The Crucible of Communication in the Church” Bradford Hinze
10:30 a.m. Coffee break

11:00 a.m. Presentation: "The Episcopal Conference in the Communications Marketplace: Issues and Challenges for Catholic Identity and Ecclesiology” Rev. Brian Lucas


12:05 p.m. Mass at the Mission Church

12:30 p.m. Lunch

Communication and Historical Theology: What can we learn from the past about how theology reflected on, or made use of, communication?

2:30 p.m. Presentation: "Aquinas on Virtues in a Media Saturated Culture” Rev. Richard Leonard, SJ

3:00 p.m. Presentation: "Elements of the Western Christian Anthropology for a Reflection on Today's Theological Significance of Human Communication” Rev. José M. Galvan

3:30 p.m. Break

4:00 p.m. Discussion

6:00 p.m. Dinner

June 26

7:30 a.m. Breakfast

Theological reflection on digital communication: How do the new epistemologies and patterns of learning challenge our theological methodologies?

9:00 a.m. Presentation: "Golden Calf and Digital Bytes. Theologizing and Visual Expression in Digital Culture” Rev. Joseph Palakeel
9:30 a.m.  Presentation: "Negotiating New Media Religiously: The Technological Apologetic as Theological Meaning Making” Heidi Campbell

10:00 a.m.  Presentation: "Theology as Persuasive Communication” Nadia Delicata

10:30 a.m.  Coffee break

11:00 a.m.  Presentation: "(In)forming in Faith: Catechesis in Dialogue with Digital Culture” Daniella Zsupan-Jerome

12:05 p.m.  Mass at the Mission Church

12:30 p.m.  Lunch

2:30 p.m.  Presentation: "Christian Art as a locus theologicus and the Digital Media” Rev. Franco Lever

3:00 p.m.  Presentation: "Saving Cyberculture: The Ecclesiology of New Media” Matthew John Paul Tan

3:30 p.m.  Break

4:00 p.m.  Presentation: Antonio Spadaro, S.J.

4:30 p.m.  Discussion

6:00 p.m.  Dinner

June 27

7:30 a.m.  Breakfast
          Open for further planning

THEOCOM Conference, 2013

Saturday, June 22

Afternoon, evening: arrivals

Sunday, June 23
10:30 a.m. Mass

Noon Lunch

1:00 p.m. Opening remarks and welcome

Changing models of communications in the Church

Matthias Scharer: Living Communication in a Digital Media Context -- Criteria from the Perspective of Communicative Theology. Dr. Scharer is on faculty for the Institut für Praktische Theologie in Innsbruck, Austria.

Heidi Campbell: Religious Digital Creatives as New Cultural and Religious Authorities. Dr. Campbell is associate professor in Communication at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

3:30 p.m. Break

4:00 p.m. Continuing presentations and discussions

Mary Hess: A new culture of learning: Implications of digital culture for communities of faith. Dr. Mary Hess is associate professor of educational leadership at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Anh Vu Ta: The Word of God in the digital world – its consequences. Father Vu Ta is in graduate studies at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, Philippines.

6:00 p.m. Dinner

7:00 p.m. Follow up discussions

Monday, June 24

7:30 a.m. Breakfast

9:00 a.m. Witnessing the Faith in social networks

Joseph Palakeel: Theologian as Imagineer: Theologizing in the Age of Image, Music and Story. Dr. Palakeel is executive director of the Syro-Malabar Church Internet Mission in Kerala, India.

Noon Mass
12:45 p.m. Lunch
2:00 p.m. Panel discussion: representatives from social media companies such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Google and Twitter. Proposed title: “Digital Social Networks’ Contributions to the Common Good”
3:30 p.m. Break
4:00 p.m. Continuing presentations and follow up discussions

Nadia Delicata: Digital culture and the reframing of theological anthropology: Original sin and Divine-Humanity in the Ecclesial task of Evangelization-as-Witness. Dr. Delicata is a lecturer in the Department of Moral and Spiritual Theology for the University of Malta.

Eileen Crowley: Digital Media Art-Making in Small Group Faith Formation: An Occasion for Experiencing Communio in Today’s Participatory Cultures. Dr. Crowley is associate professor of liturgy and worship at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

6:00 p.m. Dinner
7:00 p.m. Follow up discussions

Tuesday, June 25

7:30 a.m. Breakfast
9:00 a.m. The future relationship of art and theology
Daniella Zsupan-Jerome: Digital Creativity for Theological Education -- Creative communication: The Potential of Digital Creativity for Theological Education. Dr. Zsupan-Jerome is assistant professor of liturgy, catechesis and evangelization at Loyola University New Orleans, Louisiana.
Eileen Daily: Making Christian Art Accessible Again. Dr. Daily is assistant professor of pastoral studies at Loyola University Chicago, Institute of Pastoral Studies.

Noon        Mass
12:45 p.m.  Lunch
2:00 p.m.   Continuing presentations


José M. Galvan: The importance of the cinema in the dialogue between theology and post-modernity. Ten stages of a journey. Dr. Galvan is a member of the Department of Moral Theology at Pontificia Università della Santa Croce in Rome.

3:30 p.m.   Break
4:00 p.m.   Follow up discussions – next steps?
6 p.m.      Concluding dinner

THEOCOM 14: A Gathering Of Theologians–On Digital Communications
Who Do You Tweet That I Am?

June 22-25, 2014, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California

Participants include Rev. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, whose interview with Pope Francis in 2013 made headlines around the world, and young theologians with expertise in digital media, such as Dr. Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, of New Orleans’ Loyola Institute for Ministry.

THEOCOM 14 themes:

- What does ‘online authority’ mean in religious communities/congregations?
- How does community become ‘concrete’ in the digital space?
• What do our experiences of culture ‘offline’ provide to us in understanding new media?
• How do cultural expectations of community migrate to the digital world?
• Do the concepts of time, place, and real presence translate into the Digital Continent’s culture?

Funded by Our Sunday Visitor Institute and sponsored by:

• Pontifical Council for Social Communication
• U.S. Conference of Catholic bishops
• Greek Orthodox Church of America
• Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California

Conference schedule: all times are pacific standard time

Sunday, June 22

10:00 a.m. Mass

Noon Lunch

1:00 p.m. Opening remarks and welcome

Matthew John Paul Tan: Faith in the Church of Facebook: The Riddle of Space and Time. Dr. Tan is visiting assistant professor in Catholic Studies and in the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology at DePaul University.

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome: Virtual Presence as Real Presence? Sacramental Theology and Digital Culture in Dialogue. Dr. Zsupan-Jerome is assistant professor of liturgy, catechesis, and evangelization at Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Randy Boyagoda: Do We Need a Theology of the Disembodied to Reach Young People? Millennials and Expectations of Religious Community in a Digital Age. Dr. Boyagoda is director of Zone Learning and associate professor for Ryerson University in Toronto.

6:00 p.m. Dinner
Monday, June 23

7:30 a.m.  Breakfast

9:00 a.m.  Morning Session


Nadia Delicata: Digital Culture and the Reframing of Theological Anthropology: Original Sin and Divine-Humanity in the Ecclesial Task of Evangelization-as-Witness. Dr. Delicata is a lecturer in the Department of Moral and Spiritual Theology for the University of Malta.

Noon  Mass

12:45 p.m.  Lunch

2:00 p.m.  Afternoon Session


Joseph Palakeel: Babel, Pentecost, and Facebook: Exploring Connection, Community and Presence in Actual and Digital Space. Dr. Palakeel is executive director of the Syro-Malabar Church Internet Mission in Kerala, India.

Tuesday, June 24

7:30 a.m.  Breakfast

9:00 a.m.  Morning Session

Antonio Spadaro, SJ: The Mechanical Brain is Coming to the Aid of the Spiritual Brain. Father Spadaro is editor-in-chief of La Civiltà Cattolica, Rome.
Alexis Torrance: Sourcing Personhood: Reflections on Technology and the Human Ideal from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective. Dr. Torrance is a postdoctoral researcher at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Noon Mass

12:45 p.m. Lunch

2:00 p.m. Afternoon Session

David Trobisch: How Early Christians Read the Bible: Manuscripts, Performance, and the Role of the Community. Dr. Trobisch is the director of the Green Collection and a consultant for the American Bible Society.


3:30 p.m. Break

4:00 p.m. Follow up discussions

6:00 p.m. Concluding dinner

THEOCOM 15 Conference, Santa Clara University

Sunday, June 28

10:00 a.m. Mass at the Santa Clara Mission Church

11:45 a.m. Welcome

Noon Lunch at the University Villas (meeting site)

2:00 p.m. Drawing on past approaches to authority

Biblical and scriptural texts -- David Trobisch

Authority and Obedience: Engaging Benedictine Spirituality for Digital Communication – Daniella Zsupan-Jerome
Monster Prayer Books and Timid Bishops: A 19th-century Perspective on Religious Authority and Media in the U.S. Catholic Church -- John Osman

6:00 p.m.  Dinner

Monday, June 29

7:30 a.m.  Breakfast

9:00 a.m.  *How digital authority might work in theology*

Interpretive Authority in an Internet-Driven Participatory Culture – Sister Caroline Cerveny

Crowdsourcing Divine Truth? Exploring Theological Authority in the Digital Media world – Joseph Scaria Palakeel

The Ecclesial Body and Celebrity Heads -- Matthew Tan

Noon  Mass at Mission church

12:30 p.m.  Lunch

2:00 p.m.  *Empirical investigations into current authority issues*

How Digital Creatives Negotiate Religious Authority Online and Implications for Religious Institutions -- Heidi Campbell

The Church of Facebook: Catholic priest’s negotiation of religious authority -- Brian Altenhofen

“Redemptive Leading” – Barriers and Opportunities in a Digitized World: A Modest Proposal to Ecclesial Leaders from the Perspective of Communicative Theology (CT) -- Matthias Scharer

6:00 p.m.  Dinner
Tuesday, June 30

7:30 a.m.   Breakfast

9:00 a.m.   Developing Theological and Religious Authority in the Digital World

   Gameful learning and theological understanding: New cultures of learning in religious settings – Mary Hess

   Are you my neighbor? Theology, networks, and encounters with God and others – Stephen Garner, PhD

   Youth and Internet: Overall Contestation of Church Authority -- Guy Marchessault

   Top Catholic Websites and how the construct community? – Josep Maria Carbonell

Noon:  Mass at Mission church

12:30 p.m.  Lunch

2:00 p.m.  Other approaches to religious / theological authority

   Digital World Authority Algorithms Offer a New Lens on Church Authority -- Eileen M. Daily

   Online approaches -- Anthony Spadaro, S.J.

6:00 p.m.  Dinner

THEOCOM 17 Conference, Santa Clara University, July 2017
Digital Shepherding: Pastoral Theology and Ministry in a Digital Age

Sunday, July 23

7:30 a.m.   Breakfast on your own

10:00 a.m.  Mass, University Mission Church
11:30 a.m. Lunch - Dining Hall

1:00 p.m. Theological Foundations

Thomas Boomershine, The Embodiment of the Word: A Pastoral Approach to Scripture in a Digital Age

Archimandrite Alexandros Salmas, St. Gregory the Theologian: A Patristic Paradigm for Pastoral Theology and Ministry in the Digital Age

Break

Matthias Scharer, From Pastoral Theology to Practical Theology: The Impact of Karl Rahner's Understanding of Practical Theology in a Digital World

Nadia Delicata, Moral Theology in a Digital Age: Retrieving the Past for the Future

5:30 p.m. Dinner - Dining Hall followed by Wine Social - Villas Courtyard

Monday, July 24

7:30 a.m. Breakfast – Dining Hall

9:30 a.m. Media and Ministry

Bishop Maxim Alhambra, The Ikon and Digital Iconicity

Eileen Crowley, Media Storytelling as Ministry

Noon Mass

Lunch - Dining Hall

2:00 p.m. Education and Formation

Mary Hess, Storying Faith Amidst Digital Cultures: Renewing Religious Education in the 21st Century
Rev. Jose Palakeel, "Feed my Geeks": Reflections on Ministerial Education and Formation in Digital Culture

Break

Theology in Context

Theo Nicolakis and George Sarraf, Conciliarity in a Digital Age: A Study on the recent Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church

Josep Lluís Micó Sanz, Míriam Díez Bosch, and Alba Sabaté Gauxachs, Digital media, the New Space for Religion to Meet Youth. The Catalan Case

5:30 p.m. Dinner - Dining Hall

David Trobisch and Seth Pollinger, The Technology outreach of the Museum of the Bible

Wine Social - Villas Courtyard

Tuesday, July 25

7:30 a.m. Breakfast – Dining Hall

9:30 a.m. Pastoral Responses

Rev. Nicolas Kazarian. Spiritual Experience and Pastoral Responses in the Digital World

Levi Checketts, The Persona of the Pastor on Social Media

Noon Mass

Lunch - Dining Hall

2:00 p.m. Pastoral Implementation

Frances Forde Plude, Building ‘Listening’ Communities of Faith: A Response to the Appeal for Dialogue of Pope Francis
Niki Papageorgiou, The Orthodox Church in the Digital Era: Challenges and Perspectives

Break

Caroline Cerveny SSJ-TOSF, To Be, and Become, Missionary Disciples

Wrap-Up and Next Steps

5:30 p.m. Dinner - Dining Hall followed by wine social - Villas Courtyard

THEOCOM 18: Discerning Big Data In Light Of The Gospel: Big Data
Santa Clara University, July 2018

This year’s gathering explores big data and what implications it may hold for theology and ministry. Keynote presentations and facilitated conversations will center around:

- What is the impact of massive data accumulation on communities of faith?
- What key ethical issues does big data highlight and how might communities of faith respond to, or utilize, big data ethically?
- What does it mean to be human in an age of massive data accumulation?
- What practical ways can communities of faith benefit from big data?

THEOCOM 19: Faith Formation Shaped By Digital Culture
Santa Clara University, July 2019

THEOCOM is in its eight year as an annual symposium-style gathering of theologians and other scholars around the topics of digital culture and communication.

Past themes have included:

Theology and Communication in Dialogue (2012); Changing Models of Communications in the Church (2013); Community in the Digital World (2014); Religious and Theological Authority in a Digital World (2015); In the World and Yet Not of the World: Ecclesiology in the Digital Age (2016); Digital Shepherding: Pastoral Theology and Ministry in a Digital Age (2017); and Discerning Big Data in Light of the Gospel (2018). This year’s gathering explores faith formation and how this is shaped by the reality of digital culture.
These could include topics such as:

- What are the historical, theological, Scriptural, or liturgical traditions for forming faith?
- Who forms faith in the digital culture?
- What are formative spaces or experiences unique to this context?
- What does it mean to be formed?
- How do we assess this, especially online?
- How have the conditions/contexts of doing formation changed by the new media environment?
- How does popular theology (blogs, reflections, comments, Tweets) fit into what we might consider formative?

**Looking Forward**

*By Paul Soukup, S.J.*

I invite you to list topics you would like to propose for FUTURE Theocom meetings. If we do this, each of us can both list topics and comment on, or develop, what appears.

**Proposed Topics**

- Spirituality in the digital media age
- Conversation in a World of Trolling or something to that effect
- Further Thoughts

What struck me during THEOCOM 2017 is the varied understandings we have related to the concept of “technology” – “Digital Age” – etc.

In an eChurch eBook titled “The Future of Church Technology” I noted the following:

From its inception, the Church has been at the center of global innovation trends (like the ones mentioned above). Paul used the newly invented Roman Road system on his early missionary journeys. When people needed healthcare, the Church invented hospitals. When people needed to become literate to read the Bible, the Church started schools. Gutenberg invented the printing press to mass-produce the Bible, setting the stage for the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation.

Even into the 20th century, Pope Pius XII was saying, “The Church welcomes technological progress and receives it with love, for it is an indubitable fact that technological progress comes from God and, therefore, can, and must, lead to Him.”
Billy Graham used television to enlarge the audience of his crusades. Millions have heard the gospel through those broadcasts. But Graham did not stop there. Nearly every aspect of his ministry was impacted by the technological progress of his day. He instinctively understood its significance, too. Graham once said: “It is time for the Church to use technology to make a statement that in the midst of chaos, emptiness, and despair there is hope in the person of Jesus Christ.”

As I ponder these comments and invite you to view the following videos that are futuring statements for two major companies – Samsung and Corning:

- Earth 2020 A look into the Future - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QdkmfJ4tnU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QdkmfJ4tnU)

I often wonder, in a world that is rapidly changing because of technology, how will the church be engaged in this ever-growing Digital Culture to share the person of Jesus Christ? What will formation be in a Digital Culture? Other ideas?

What comes to mind for me are the following themes:

- Theology in a Digital World: Its Future in a Participatory Culture
- Theology in a Digital Participatory Culture
- Digital Shepherding in a Participatory Culture: Growing into a Future
- Jesus Alive in a Digital Participatory Culture

I am also wondering, with Santa Clara University in the heart of “Silicon Valley” where the giants of – Google, Citrix, and Apple are headquartered – what could this group experience by a visit to at least one of these locations?

Silicon Valley Innovation Center (To plan a one-day tour or a ½ day tour) - [https://siliconvalley.center/?gclid=CjwKCAjwk4vMBRAgEiwA4ftLs8IolOJJANrsCcfNNDPdEfWsQTeNZIwhcVO1fKduQtELEABHvGlvFB0C1sMQAvD_BwE](https://siliconvalley.center/?gclid=CjwKCAjwk4vMBRAgEiwA4ftLs8IolOJJANrsCcfNNDPdEfWsQTeNZIwhcVO1fKduQtELEABHvGlvFB0C1sMQAvD_BwE)

(Looks like they are the ones to coordinate what would fit the THEOCOM group) I would love to do more than just visit a campus or two. This group may be able to tailor something for the THEOCOM group.

Visit the Google Campus (Do we know anyone for an “insider tour?”)
https://www.tripsavvy.com/googleplex-the-google-head-office-in-mountain-view-2993763 or

Visit the Apple Campus – Apple Park Visitor Center - https://foursquare.com/v/apple-park-visitor-center/58adc74414250b60365c3f40/photos

Response from Matthias Scharer

I want to react briefly to your invitation to share proposals for further meetings of TheoCom. I agree with the statement there are different mindsets concerning Social Media in our group. As you can see in all my comments on our Conferences, the ambivalence of Digital Media is one of my favorite hypotheses, and I cannot join in an undifferentiated Jubilee on the Digital Age.

This does not mean I keep myself out of the Digital Context in which I am living and working. I agree with P. Antonio that the Digital World is not only the house of all of us; it becomes more and more our home. But in my mind, my home is not my castle.

Like the Letter on Diognet from the Second Christian Century says: "Any country can be their homeland, but for them, their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country."

The world of Billy Graham is not my World of doing Theology, even as I do it within my Digital home. But within the World in which the aim to reduce ambivalences is rising, and is supported also by Digital Media, I want to hold up the critical position.

So, I value the diversity in our group as we belong to Social Media and a Digital World. However, as a Theologian within the Church, I have also to criticize some naiveties in the statements of the Churches reflecting on our subject.

If you would ask me about the next subject for our Conferences, two come to my mind:

- In our evaluation at the 2016 Conference was a strong proposal to go from "We" (2016) to the change of the "I," the human, within the Digital World and what it means theologically, and anthropologically, and in practical ways.
- Another subject could be the interreligious and trans-religious experience within a Digital home.

P.S. To visit in Silicon Valley for half a day would be a nice experience.
Communication And Theology Conference: St. John’s University, September 16-18 (2008)

Host: Professor Basilio Montiero

Conference Sessions:

1. Theological and Philosophical Context for Communication

   A. Thomas Bauer: “Believe to Know and Know to Believe: Communication as a Unit of Difference, Distinction, and Assimilation. Good Reasons for a Social Theory of Faith”

   B. Craig Baron: “The Best of Times and the Worst of Times: Christian Theology in the Media Age”

   C. John M. Phelan: “The Shared Urgent Relevance of Communication and Theology Studies”

   D. Jose Palakeel: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? Implications of transmediatization of Christian Theology from Oral to Written Culture”


2. The Ethics of Communicating Theology

   A. Phillip Lee: “Toward A Theology of Communication Rights”

   B. G. Mazza: “Communicate by Listening: Announcement, Consent, Communication”

   C. Jacob Srampickal: “Inter-Religious Dialogue is for Developing Relations, Not Just for Dialogue: A Communications Perspective


3. Theology in the Public Square
A. Robert Badillo: “From the Unwarranted Limits of Habermas’ Communicative Reason to the Open Horizon of Ratzinger’s Communicative Logos to Its Grounding via Rielo’s Genetic Metaphysics


C. Maria Way: “Cartoons and Theology”

D. Frances Forde Plude: “Ecclesiological Dialogue: An Analysis of Pope Benedict’s Visit to the U.S”

E. Peter Feuerherd: “Media Images and Male Spirituality”

4. Theology Expressed in the Arts

A. Robert Lauder: “Revelation and Revelations: God and the Movies”

B. Damian Armana: “Hierophany in Nollywood and its Theological Import”

C. Glenn Statile: “Communication, Consecration and the Catholic Novel”

D. Eileen D. Crowley: “Theological Reflection on Communal Co-Creation of Liturgical Media Art”

E. Rose Pacatte: “Lights, Camera…Faith! The National Film Retreat as Pastoral Communication”

5. Finding God in the Virtual World

A. Deborah Greh: “In Search of God in Second Life”

B. Kathryn G. Shaugnessy: “WWW and God”

C. C. Jean-Pierre Ruiz: "Between Babel and Babble: Bible Scholarship on the Blogosphere”

Fifth International Conference On Media, Religion & Culture: Mediating Religion In The Context Of Multicultural Tension

The Sigtuna Foundation, Stockholm/Sigtuna/Uppsala, Sweden, 6-9 July 2006

Preliminary Program (Updated June 12)

Thursday, July 6

12:00-14:00 Registration and lunch
14:00-14:30 Welcome and Conference information, Alf Linderman, Conference director, Mia Lövheim, Assistant conference director

14:30-15:45 Plenary I: Sacred Symbols and Sacred Freedom – in the context of multicultural tension

Perspectives on the publication of the Mohammed caricatures:
Ahmed Abu Laban, Imam, Islamska trossamfundet, Copenhagen
Tim Jensen, Lecturer, University of Southern Denmark
Dilsa Demirbag-Sten, Journalist Expressen and DN, Sweden
Knut Lundby, Professor, Media and Communication, University of Oslo

15:45-16:15 Coffee and Tea

16:15-17:30 Parallel session A

(1) Panel: Implications of the Sacred in Nordic Media and Religion Studies

Moderator: Johanna Sumiala-Seppänen, Helsinki University, Finland
Panelists: Stig Hjarvard, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Titus Hjelm Helsinki University, Finland
Jeanette Sky University of Trondheim, Norway
Knut Lundby University of Oslo, Norway
Mia Lövheim Uppsala University, Sweden

(2) Paper Session: Media and Society

European Public Broadcasting, Religion and Diversity. Jim McDonnell, SIGNIS, World Catholic Association for Communication, UK.

The Use and Misuse of Media in Building Religious Affiliations in India. *Jacob Srampickal*, Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Communications, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy.

Communication Patterns of Behaviors and Religious Affiliations as Predictors of the Romanians’ Attitudes Towards the Country’s Integration in the European Union. *Valentina Marinescu*, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest, Romania.

Chair: *Ester Pollack*, Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, Stockholm University.

(3) Paper Session: Religious Media/Religion in Media

Israeli Rabbis & the Media, *Yoel Cohen*, School of Communications, Netanya Academic College, Department of Communication, Lifshitz Religious Education College, Jerusalem, Holon Academic Institute of Technology, Israel.


Religion in the Process of Democracy Building in Poland, *Maria Marczewska-Rytko*, Faculty of Political Science, Maria Curie Sklodowska University, Lulin, Poland.

Impact of Islamic Resurgence on the Management of Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM), *Zulkiple Abd Ghani*, Department of Dakwah and Leadership Studies, National University of Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.


Chair: *Adan Merano*, JM Communication, Houston, USA.
18:00-19:00  Welcome reception

19:00  Dinner

21:00  Film
   Så som i himmelen (2004) 127 minutes, aka “As in Heaven”
   Introduction: Tomas Axelson, Dalarna University, Uppsala University

Friday, July 7

07:30-08:45  Breakfast

09:00-10:15  Plenary II: Media and Ritual

   Nick Couldry, Reader in Media, Communications and Culture, Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics

   Daniel Dayan, Fellow at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris, Professor of Media Sociology at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris

   Moderator: Johanna Sumiala Seppänen, Helsinki University, Finland

10:15-10:45  Coffee and Tea

10:45-12:00  Parallel Session B

   (4) Paper Session: New Media I

   Mediatizing faith, Knut Lundby & Birgit Hertzberg Kaare, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo, Norway.


   Who is a Sikh? Colonial and Contemporary Media Constructions of Sikh Identity, Doris R. Jakobsh, Department of Religious Studies, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.
Chair: *Anders Sjöborg*, Sociology of Religion, Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University


The Role of the Internet in the Construction of a Trans-national Christian Metal Music Scene. *Marcus Moberg*, Comparative Religion, Åbo Akademi University, Finland.


Chair: *Andreas Häger*, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

(6) Paper Session: Film and Religion


Negotiating a Place to Stand: Biculturalism, Religiosity and Maori Film in Aoteroa/New Zealand, *Ann Hardy*, Department of Screen and Media Studies, University of Waikato, Hamilton New Zealand.

Relations Between Jews and Non-Jews in Contemporary European Films and Societies, *Stephanie Knauss*, Institut für Fundamentaltheologie, University of Graz.

Chair: *Arni Svanur Danielson*, Systematic Theology, University of Iceland.

(7) Panel: Religion and Media at National Borders and Boundaries
Islam in British Media: the Case of Documentaries, Hossein Godazgar, Department of Social Sciences, University of Tabriz, Iran.


Being A Non-Muslim in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Media Consumption, Meaning, and Religion among Young Iranians - Morehshin Allahyari, Teheran University.

The consumption of Iranian and Armenian satellite TVs by Iranian-Armenians, Loosineh Markarian, Teheran University, Iran.

Chair: Lynn Schofield Clark, University of Colorado at Boulder.
VI. Practical Case Studies
Building Dialogic Communities Of Faith: A Response To The Appeal For Dialogue From Pope Francis

By Frances Forde Plude

[Presented at the 2017 Theocom conference at Santa Clara University.]

Introduction

When thinking about how to begin – this opening – I thought back to an early article of mine entitled “My Multi-Media Marriage.” It was a reflection, by a relatively new bride, on how media were impacting my marriage relationship. The opening sentence was: “We didn’t buy a television set until a year after we were married… and that’s how I knew the honeymoon was over.”

Well, I don’t have an intriguing sentence like that to begin today, but let’s use the opening sentence of my recent article on “A Listening Church” in the Jesuit journal America: “How does the center of institutional authority – in the Catholic Church, the papacy and the Vatican – allow dialogue within a global, decentralized, talk-back culture? The answer is… with great difficulty.”

So, my subject, broadly, is dialogue within and outside of church. This section of the theological enterprise is called “ecclesiology”; and this part of the communication enterprise is called… well, dialogue or interactive communication.

First, an overview. I will share some personal roots, and then, refer, briefly, to a trail of thoughtful events linking the two areas of theology and communication. Next a stop at a rich junction posed by the theologian Bradford Hinze. Then, a quick trip to Europe for a unique project, both theoretically rich and uniquely practical. And, finally, a proposed project that could begin to move this communitive theology project into U.S. churches – to “people in the pews.”

A few things from my own personal story have affected my viewpoint on all this. I grew up in a small Michigan town with 3,000 people and almost a dozen Protestant churches. We had a tiny Catholic parish, almost a mission outpost, where the nearby Bishop’s secretary visited once a week to celebrate Mass. But my regular experience of church life around me was permeated by pot-luck suppers and terms like “fellowship” and “personal witness.” This was in stark contrast to our Catholic service in Latin where people came on Sunday, primarily for Eucharist, and they did little interacting with each other after Mass.

This was followed by four years of Jesuit pre-Vatican II education at Boston College where four courses each year of college watered my thirst for theology and philosophy. And, later, working
within the Boston-area Catholic Church in an administrative post and in conjunction with ten other dioceses nationally I had a chance to learn TV production and put a new television station on the air. And do some graduate work in theology that fortified my Vatican II leanings.

Then, at age 42, I began three years of full-time doctoral work at Harvard and MIT to bolster my “on the ground” work in telecommunications, with a rich education in theory and research tools. My dissertation was dialogical as I conducted a Delphi exercise with leading policy makers on the issue of satellite-to-home government policies. However, it was important, as I look back on it now, that years of practical work in the field preceded this theoretical work. So, I am always haunted by the question: How can we move our theoretical studies out into the field? What does theology – and communicative theology in particular – have to say to “the people in the pews?”

Along with my personal story, communication and theology have a history of their own attempt at a marriage. Between 1984 and 1997 there were 8 Cavalletti Conferences (and follow-up conferences) – named “Cavalletti” after the villa outside Rome where most were held. Among topics covered by theologians and communication specialists in dialogue were these: communication as impacted by theology and philosophy (generally), by moral theology, by the U.S. Catholic Church, by ecclesiology, by theological foundations, by the new image of religious film, by media, religion and popular culture, and by rethinking theology and ministry in the light of current developments in communication. Many of these dialogues lasted a week as participants lived together, reacted to rich papers, and later published articles or books as follow-up.

Another thread began in 1993, when Father Bob Bonnot and I started to executive produce a decade of annual seminars within the convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America. These sessions brought together a prominent theologian and communication specialist for a dialogue between them and with CTSA members. Some of these topics were: Lonergan/Rahner, Communication/Theology and Catechesis; A New Hermeneutic for Theology; Trinity and Communication; Narrative and Communication Theology in a Post-literate Culture; Preaching as Communication Theology; A Look at the TV series “Nothing Sacred” with the series creators; Ecclesial Reception, Communication, and Development of Doctrine; Cultural Contest and Theological Communication; and Music as an Expression of Theology and Communication. Among specialists featured were Paul Soukup, Paul Philibert, John R. Sachs, Terrence Tilley, Edmund Arens, Mary Catherine Hilkert, Thomas O’Meara, Bill Cain, Kevin Bradt, Richard Gaillardetz, Kathryn E. Tanner, Tom Beaudoin, Mary Hess and Tom Boomershine.

In addition, I remember organizing a Communication Theology small group discussion hosted by Robert Schreiter at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Among those present were
Father Schreiter, the German theologian Hermann Pottmeyer, Father Bonnot, and several members of the International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture.

This international commission met annually for a decade in various sites around the globe – in Hollywood, Canada, Australia, Thailand, Africa, Brazil, Rome, and Ukraine, for example. Our Study Commission would stay in each locale for a week and hear presentations from local experts, dialogue about ideas, etc. And again, many articles and several books resulted. Very significantly, the funders then donated money to underwrite younger scholars in doing doctoral studies to continue the work. One young priest from India did his doctoral work in Australia, under the guidance of one of our commission members.

And we have added six years of Theocom conferences at Santa Clara University in California, with themes such as: Theology and Communication in Dialogue; Changing Models of Communication in the Church; Community in a Digital World; Ecclesiology in the Digital Age; and Digital Shepherding: Pastoral Theology and Ministry in a Digital Age. These conferences were hosted by Paul Soukup, S.J.

In this rich history, I feel a little like Forrest Gump. I have been present at many of these conferences and meetings. I have file folders full of notes. I have networked globally with most of the individuals working on the dialogue between communication and theology. And I have developed a Resource Kit of bibliographies of these writings I would be happy to share widely.

And now I would like to zoom in on several specific projects of special note. Both are of great interest to me because of my haunting question: What does all this have to do with the lives of “people in the pews?” Research indicates about 30 million Americans raised as Catholic no longer identify themselves as Catholic. What about the rise of “the nones” among millennials (those who identify with none of the religious groups)? What about the many parishes and congregations where people gather for Eucharist or a “shot-in-the-arm” homily and then rush home without forming a real faith community? How can this rich history of Communicative Theology and awareness of a digital dialogic globe reach people? How do we move from our studies and our conference papers out into “the real world” of faith communities?

One of my favorite theologians exploring this is Bradford Hinze, who holds the Karl Rahner Chair in Theology at Fordham University in New York City. Brad and I have had many conversations; he attended the first Theocom conference, and he has authored two books of enormous value on ecclesiology and dialogue. Hinze has served as President of both the College Theology Society and the Catholic Theological Society of America.

Hinze’s most recent book is *Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church*. In this book, the author tracks how the two major gifts of the Second Vatican Council are the theology
of the prophetic voice of the people of God in the church’s discernment and decision-making, along with the gift of collegiality. And how “the church as the people of God” theology was eclipsed by the two Popes who preceded Pope Francis. In contrast, as my own essay in the journal America explains, our current Pope implores bishops to be more dialogic.

Hinze’s “on the ground research” in this book studies New York Synods, Presbyteral Councils, Parish Pastoral Councils, and the chapter meetings and renewal of the Sisters of Charity. In an earlier book entitled Practices of Dialogue by the Roman Catholic Church the Hinze case studies include parish councils, diocesan synods, The Call to Action meeting in Detroit, the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral letters on peace and the economy, the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, and the Adrian Dominican nuns’ Chapter procedures. So, he has been out among “the people in the pews” as he advocates for dialogic ecclesiology!

Hinze comments: “A Christocentric ecclesiology that stressed the divine character of Jesus Christ… theologically justified the Catholic Church’s hierarchy, institution and supremacy.” While affirming this, Vatican II “culminated in a new portrayal of the drama of the Triune God … a relational view of God’s identity – a dialogical church as a sign of a triune communion of diverse persons.” This concept of a relational God, and the view that communication is basically relational, appears as Communicative Theology began to take root in Germany and Austria. More about that shortly.

Hinze claims his research indicates that dialogue means that “people gain insight into both their personal and communal identity; horizons expand, minds and hearts change, conversions occur.” He notes that “In the Catholic Church we are still in the early phases of developing the skills of collective discernment and decision-making. We need to develop programs for cultivating such skills in local churches and centers for ministerial preparation, including seminaries…”

And now to the development of Communicative Theology in Germany and Austria. Brad Hinze and another colleague, Professor Mary Ann Hinsdale, of the Boston College faculty, have been active partners in this project. Mary Hess, one of our colleagues here, studied with Hinsdale at BC, and was involved as a staff associate at a Communicative Theology gathering at Fordham a few years ago. I attended that meeting and have been pondering this project ever since.

The real pioneers of Communicative Theology are Matthias Scharer and Bernd Hilberath. Matthias is here with us and Bernd has spoken at a previous Theocom gathering. I will speak briefly about some history and characteristics of Communicative Theology and how it seems to me to fit a need for introducing a dialogic process into U.S. parishes.

I am presenting this as one way to introduce communication and theology to people in the pews. It is not the only way. It just might be the best way. However, after decades of seeing theologians
and communicators talk and write about these ideas, this seems to me a workable method for introducing Communicative Theology theory and practice on the ground. In the process, I maintain more vibrant faith communities can be formed from the ground up. I believe this would provide a systematic response to the urgent plea for dialogue we have heard from Pope Francis.

The key book of explanation is The Practice of Communicative Theology: An Introduction to a New Theological Culture, published by Crossroad. Here are some explanatory comments from Hilberath’s earlier Theocom talk. “Communicative theology is not a theory of communication… It addresses itself to the whole of reality – a trait it shares with the Theology of Liberation… Analogously, Communicative Theology has its foundation in God’s self-communication… in the revelation of a ‘communicative God’ … for all times and places …It arose out of the practice of theological communication within groups at Innsbruck University as well as programs for pastoral leaders and religious educators.”

As the work of Scharer and Hilberath converged, they followed three key convictions: 1) in theology content and method cannot be separated; 2) in theology, teaching and learning are only possible as a process; and 3) all of the participants must be taken seriously. Noting enormous communication deficits, Scharer introduced the methodology of Ruth C. Cohn into the ecclesiology of a communicating God, showing a desire to enter a relationship with all humanity. Hilberath explains: “In a typical Communicative Theology working group, all participants are recognized as ‘experts’, each in their own way… (Ruth Cohen said each individual must be their own chairperson). A balance is maintained because discussions do not take place in an authoritarian, but rather in a communicative manner, which creates a space for personal witness.” We need to explore how this could work out in a parish.

In an introduction in the Scharer and Hiberath, Brad Hinze notes: “(These authors) are experimenting with, and reflecting on, group processes that promote personal and collective discernment and decision making in the church… they have developed a theologically integrated approach to group communicative practices that speaks out of the word and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council… (and) embodies some of the most important insights into the practices of Base Christian Communities and Small Christian Communities…” (p 9).

A fascinating aspect of this approach, inspired by Cohn, is that conflict within groups should be welcomed and addressed, facilitated by the group leader who is also a group member. Cohn stressed three axioms: 1) a human being is simultaneously autonomous and interdependent; 2) respect is due to all living things and their development; and 3) free decisions take place within external and internal limits; these limits, however, can be expanded. Communicative Theology adds these options: 1) an option for patience based on grace; 2) an option for the poor; 3) an option for standing fast; and 4) an option for contemplation and the mystical The ultimate norm is not the self-directed experience of the I, or the group-related experience of the we, and not the
context of the globe. It is the experience of the communicative God (this content is called the It). within the space defined by all four dimensions.

The practice of Communicative Theology might come into focus if we explain a sample of a parish project we are conceptualizing. So, I will invite Matthias to come up here with me as we explain what we propose and then ask all of you to make suggestions that will guide us further in the project. On Saturday afternoon, after Mary Hess and Matthias and I arrived, we had a three-hour planning session about the project, but this is still very much a work in progress. The basic proposal is attached here in the Appendix below.

**Appendix**

PROPOSAL: Building *Learning* Faith Communities (LFCs)

**Introduction**

People of a certain age can remember when Catholic parishes and other faith communities were full and the spirit of these groups was expansive, energized and caring. Many things have changed.

There’s competition for our time and focus. Individualization and competition have increased. A secular culture competes with belief. Education has made many wiser (or more cynical). The second Vatican Council liberated many, perplexing others. And sexual abuse.

For more than 15 years The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University has conducted research and offered planning studies for various strands of Catholic institutions including parishes. They have focused on a cross-section of parishioners, so their data do probe the faith community in depth. [See *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, 2017.]

In comparing numbers between 1965 and 2016 CARA found:

- Priest numbers have dropped from 58,632 to 37,192
- Parishes with no resident pastor = 549; now it is 3,499
- Active diocesan priests per parish have dropped in half
- Adult baptisms were 126,209; in 2016 they were 37,953
- Mass attendance: in 1965 = 55%; in 2016 = 22%
In 2016 over 30 million Catholic adults who were raised Catholic no longer self-identify as Catholic, according to CARA. And the Catholic school system – providing early grounding in their faith for Catholic youth – is about half the size of 1965 at the elementary-school level.

How can we energize communities of faith facing such changes? Most current projects (RENEW, Leadership Roundtable, etc.) focus on strengthening professional staff and top lay leadership in parishes.

This project, based on a long track record of theory and practice, focuses on a maturation process for “people in the pews.”

**Background**

The project Building Learning Faith Communities is based upon a workshop model developed by two European scholars in conjunction with Bradford E. Hinze, author of *Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church*. Sister Mary Ann Hinsdale, of Boston College, has also participated in the workshop design. Both are past Presidents of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA). Thus, the background history is of this project is unique.

In the darkest days of Hitler’s Germany, a gifted psychiatrist, Ruth C. Cohn, escaped to America. She moved “from the treatment of individuals to a pedagogy for everyone.” She “transformed her existential experiences (of persecution) into the hope of supporting humane action in all areas of society by strengthening individual and group self-confidence, combined with a vital system of values.”

During the past 30 years, Cohn’s methodology, known as “Theme-Centered Interaction” (TCI) has spread rapidly. As explained in the book *The Practice of Communicative Theology* by Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath – the two European scholars mentioned above – churches are described as communities of communication.

They describe their model as a triangle within a circle. Imagine the three corners of the triangle as 1) the faith tradition; 2) individuals with their life and faith history; and 3) people in their groups and communities with their interactions. The circle surrounding this triangle represents the global reality of society and church.

Cohn developed techniques to help individuals grow in self-understanding and respect for others within a group (such as a parish). Her hope was that this respect for every individual would release each person’s gifts for the benefit of the entire group – in contrast to the degradation of respect for individuals during Hitler’s reign.
The team of Scharer, Hilberath, Hinze and Hillsdate have met regularly with others to guide research as workshops held in Europe attracted hundreds of individuals from parishes and dioceses. Hinze hosted a workshop at Fordham University which was attended by many theologians from throughout the U.S. Workshops have been conducted in Asia that were ecumenical; Scharer has worked with groups including Muslims.

**Project Components**

This project seeks support for a two-year pilot project consisting of six parts.

1. *Analysis of the way workshops could enrich U.S. parish communities*
   
   This would be done through dialogue with parish members of a pilot group of U.S. parishes, with “people-in-the-pews”, with youth, and with people who have dropped out of parish communities.

2. *Adapt the Workshop Model used in Europe to U.S. culture*
   
   This workshop re-design would be done by American individuals who have participated in the existing workshop model. This work would also be done in conjunction with selected parishioners, involving individuals of different ages, including youth.

3. *Establish a network of a representative of U.S. Retreat Centers*
   
   These individuals would host workshops later at their locales. This will require gathering retreat representatives together to experience a workshop themselves. Some of this could be facilitated by teleconferences.

4. *Organize a program of information to attract workshop participants*
   
   This systematic advertising effort would include contact with existing organizations like RENEW, the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministry (NACFLM), and the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), along with the client list of U.S. Retreat Houses. Youth groups could also be targeted. This presupposes this project would *supplement* good work already being done by the above organizations (i.e., all such efforts support other parish-assistance projects).

5. *Conduct a specific number of workshops in Retreat Houses across the U.S.*
   
   Participants would *experience* a Theme-Centered Interaction workshop at the Retreat; they would discuss ways these principles could be integrated into their own individual parish communities – where they would emphasize *listening* to others, encouraging parishioners’ self-development and faith-community support.
6. Project evaluation

Each Retreat House would commit to a thoughtful reflection after the workshop experience. Video conferences could be held with experienced workshop leaders to assess how to improve workshops during the life of the project.

After the two-year period a thorough evaluation would be done to determine how the project should be shaped for future Workshops. Materials could be published.
A Dialogical Analysis Of Pope Benedict’s Visit To The U.S.

By Frances Forde Plude

[This paper was presented at a conference at St. John’s University, 2008.]

Recently several personal experiences have dramatically reinforced my commitment to communication dialogue – in ecclesiology (theology of church), in culture, and in the on-going life of the Catholic Church.

The first experience was a trip to Eisenach – a town in Germany with its nearby Wartburg fortress. I visited there the small room in which Martin Luther translated the New Testament, in 1521, from the Greek original into a poetic easy-to-read German. This new medium, soon in print, was to make the Scriptures more accessible to God’s people. Thus, I was reminded that the Catholic Church paid a huge price at that time because it did not really listen to the culture or read ‘the signs of the times.”

My second experience involves a Ukrainian dissident. I do not know how many of you have ever personally known someone who was imprisoned for their support of human rights. As I have come to know such a person myself it has re-focused my own commitment to the vital importance of dialogue, of listening, of feedback. My Ukrainian colleague, Myroslav Marynovych, was a young man in the Soviet Union when he was imprisoned and then exiled to the Gulag; he endured ten years of involuntary separation from his family, his friends, and what would be considered a normal life in Ukraine. What a price to pay for the opportunity to dialogue freely!

In a recent book of his writings he and I have collaborated on, Professor Marynovych speaks of a spiritual experience, while a prisoner, that continues to influence his current work in ecumenism. He recalls that he understood at that moment that everything starts from the vision of unification – “in the sense of uniting, not bringing multiplicity to uniformity.” In an age of blogs and uninterrupted voices in our media, including the Internet, it may seem there is too much dialogue today. However, many voices are still not really heard.

Many years ago, teaching in London, I wrote a book chapter reflecting upon the importance of a listening church – a communion ecclesiology. I remember being aware back then that two-way communication technologies are a metaphor for a more dialogic church. I reflected upon all this in the light of the communio theology that emerged from the Second Vatican Council – a view that sees the Church as a universal fellowship animated by the Spirit.

22 Frances Forde Plude, “Interactive Communications in the Church”, in The Church and Communication, Patrick Granfield, ed., Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994
In that text I spoke of:

- The roles of participatory communication and authority
- Shared responsibility among laypersons
- Bernard Häring’s concept of “a listening Church”\(^{23}\) and
- How interactivity helps to remove passivity.

In organizing my current reflections on the Pope’s visit, I reflected upon that earlier text of fifteen years ago, in addition to a recent book chapter of mine\(^{24}\) on the need for dialogue in religion and mediated popular culture.

Three principles articulated in these earlier works provide a methodological framework for these current reflections.

First, interactive communication tools play a key role in encouraging freedom of expression and the processes of negotiation throughout the world. Secondly, as Häring wrote in the 1970s, “A teaching Church that is not, above all, a learning, listening Church, is not on the wavelength of divine communication.\(^{25}\) And, thirdly, there exists, as theologian Bradford Hinze has noted, “an unfinished theological agenda for a dialogical church.” (Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments, NY: Continuum, 2006, p 102).

Meanwhile our Church and our global culture have been rocked by the explosive growth of the Internet, cell phone usage, social networks, digital assistants, blogs and wireless technology – not to mention a sexual abuse scandal and a significant increase in lay ministries in the Church. The visit of Pope Benedict to the U.S. seemed like a good opportunity to reflect upon how all this interactivity played out – or did not – as the Pope spoke with U.S. Catholics during his visit. Interesting too would be how the media reported the visit both in one-way and two-way formats.

My recent personal experiences and reflections cited above also reminded me of a conversation I had with three international theologians fifteen years ago. Over lunch I asked: “What is the single most important theology issue today?” They all agreed: the local church. They said the unfinished agenda of Vatican II is the issue of the relationship of local churches to the centralized authority in Rome. For many this is described as “collegiality” and “communion of churches” – to what extent (and how) does the Church leadership in Rome share responsibility

\(^{25}\) Häring, Free and Faithful in Christ, II, 155
for reading ‘the signs of the times’ with bishops and clergy and laity around the world? This has, today, become a major issue with the Church in Asia and Africa as issues of inculturation continually arise. This was debated widely in Latin America by proponents of liberation theology.

All of this prompted me to review the reflections of several key theologians on the topic. A valuable text is supplied by the eminent German theologian Hermann Pottmeyer. His work *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives From Vatican Councils I and II* was commissioned by Crossroad as a response to Pope John Paul II’s encyclical letter *Ut unum sint*. Pottmeyer says “this encyclical could begin a development in the course of which the papacy in its Latin form might become an ecumenical Petrine ministry” (p 13).

Pottmeyer adds: “Pope John Paul II’s admission of the possibility that the present way of exercising the primacy is no longer in keeping with today’s ecumenical situation has caused many Christians to sit up and take notice. For by this admission he opens the way for an ecumenical Petrine ministry” (p 14).

While I had earlier carefully studied Pottmeyer’s book, it was instructional to review it again in the light of Pope Benedict’s visit to the U.S. For in analyzing this visit I was forced to think about the possibilities of dialogical interaction between the papacy and the Church in the U.S and with the context of this local church which exists in a culture of many non-Catholic and other religious groups in the United States. I may add that, in recent years, my own work has introduced me to the Syro-Malabar rite of the Catholic Church in India and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, both in union with Rome but exhibiting unique and valuable historical, cultural, even liturgical differences. How does the Catholic Church attain the unification (rather than uniformity)? My Ukrainian colleague envisioned in his prison cell.

Pottmeyer uses a rich metaphor. He says the Second Vatican Council is like the building site of St. Peter’s Basilica in the sixteenth century – with four monumental supporting columns that would later hold up the dome of St. Peter’s.

The work of Vatican II has remained a building site. Alongside the old edifice of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Vatican centralization arise the four mighty supporting columns of a renewed church and a renewed ecclesiology: the church as people of God; the church as sacrament of the kingdom of God in the world; the college of bishops; and ecumenism…the building erected by centralization awaits demolition … and a renewed ecclesiology waits to be crowned by the dome that draws them into unity (p 110).

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Pottmeyer adds:

In the twentieth century the social form of the Catholic Church has greatly changed. It has become a global church... That was already clear at Vatican II, which therefore expressly gave thought to the task of a new inculturation and to diversity as a mark of Catholicity (p. 18).

Pottmeyer notes the second millennium brought a new paradigm in the church’s self-understanding:

- A schism occurred between the Church of the East and the Church of the West.
- The Western Church became increasingly a papal monarchy.
- The Western Church was struggling for independence from secular princes.
- Canonists increasingly adopted Roman law and canonists now defined what was Church; the Church became increasingly juridicized.

Within this paradigm a new conception of the papal primacy of jurisdiction developed. Vatican II struggled to deal with this, but a minority opinion forced a compromise in its ecclesiology.

According to Pottmeyer, Joseph Ratzinger, a young Council theologian, noted that “… the special position of the pope… is in no way challenged by the synod of bishops, such as was suggested by the council, or by other forms of Episcopal participation in the government of the universal church. For there has always been some form of shared governance in practice… Pottmeyer also reminds us of the original three-membered or triadic form of church structure.

… the particular church with its bishop; the regional ecclesiastical units, especially the patriarchal churches with their patriarchs; and for the universal church, the Pope. … the regional structures made it possible for these churches to acquire a distinctive form that was independent, yet rooted in the surrounding cultural world… they could develop (a) distinctive form. In other words, they made inculturation possible. … The patriarchal churches were governed by the patriarchs, together with the synod of bishops. … Only when the patriarchal structure of the West came to be understood as the structure for the universal church did the two-membered, or dual, structural form replace the triadic. Only then did the church of the West lose its character as a communion of churches and replace this with uniformity and centralization. On the other hand, the Eastern church, now lacking the center of unity and the ministry of communion, saw its unity disintegrate into a multiplicity of autocephalous or autonomous churches,
which have not found their way to a workable communion among themselves (pp 133-134).

My Ukrainian colleague struggles with this latter situation in modern Ukraine and longs for a Patriarch who will bring the unification (rather than uniformity) he envisioned in his prison cell. My own passion for dialogue in communication and ecclesiology leads me to hope for such a papacy in communion and to look for traces of it in this papal visit to the U.S. Before we get to the papal visit, however, we must make one more theological stop – to the reflections of U.S. theologian Bradford Hinze. He has published (mentioned above) a grass-roots American analysis in *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments*, in which he asserts “an unfinished theological agenda for a dialogical church.”

Hinze, a theology professor at Fordham University, has undertaken there an analysis of various dialogic arenas in the United States Catholic Church. His case studies involve a review of dialogue at work – or not – in: the life of the parish and the pastoral council; the bishop and the diocesan synod; the Call to Action national assembly held in 1976; America’s bicentennial; several pastoral letters of the U.S. Bishops’ Conference; the Catholic Common Ground Initiative established by the late Cardinal Bernardin; the Chapters held by women Religious; the Synod of Bishops; and in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Hinze notes he planned to explore key examples of dialogical practices in the post-Vatican II Church. He adds: “My larger aim was to construct a theological argument about the dialogical and communicative character of the church that would engage diverse and at times contentious philosophical, social-theoretical, and theological resources.” However he notes: “… I became convinced that the voices of the actual practitioners of dialogue in the church were at least as important to heed as those of philosophers, social theorists, and theologians who have addressed the topic of dialogue and communication.”

Many aspects of communication and dialogue are explored in this Hinze volume. A partial list would include:

- the connection between ecclesial dialogue and Trinitarian theology (pp 7, 266)
- the various genres of dialogue such as small groups, hearings, consultations, interacting with a text; inner dialogues with the self; the reception of one-way speeches; liturgical rituals; and the individual’s and community’s dialogue with God
- Vatican II’s groundwork for a dialogical approach, but “such participation is understood to be consultative, not deliberative. This distinction … is intelligible and perhaps even practical, yet it implies a restriction of the roles of theologians and the entire people of God in matters of teaching and governance…” (p 268)
• A comparison of “a muscular hierarchical vision of the church” compared to “a different kind of story unfolding here about communal conversion to a dialogical vision of the church, about diverse forms of resistance to implementing these reforms and about the difficulties in learning new ways of being in relationship and collaboration.” (p 239)

“Dialogical discernment and decision making are arguably the most important lessons learned over the last forty years” and “some would limit this lesson … only to the extent that it is consistent with the consultative-only clause in the Code of Canon Law” (p 255). Hinze notes: “A procedural democracy, where everyone has a voice and the voice of the majority rules, is not the same as a discerning, deliberating, decision-making community of the wise.” Hinze acknowledges barriers. Critics’ concerns “are not simply in the interest of defending ecclesiastical authority. Their deeper suspicions and fears are that these practices are pulling people away from the most basic perduring convictions and practices of faith by the attraction and influence of popular modern Western culture.”

He notes that some critics (Avery Dulles among them) contrast the traditional approach to dialogue (that of Plato, Augustine, and personalist philosophies) with prevailing conceptions of dialogue and democratic political theory like liberalism which may be relativist. Hinze urges more complete study in this area; he thinks this oversimplifies the options available. Hinze speaks of another problem. “Sometimes, to attain a wider consensus, councils or synods omit difficult and controversial topics rather than attempt to address them at different, sometimes deeper levels. … If conflict avoidance is the operative motive, the community is not being well served in the dialogical process.”

Another significant problem is noted by Hinze:

It is remarkable that of all the groups in the church described in the documents of Vatican II, not one word was written about the role of theologians in the life of the church, about their constructive collaborative relationships with bishops, or about the importance of the relationship of theologians with wider circles of the faithful…Moreover, and equally telling, the synod of bishops has addressed every group in the church except theologians (p 247).

However, he adds: “Theologians, on the other hand, must be held accountable for the ways they have excluded bishops and various sectors of the people of God from the circles of relationships that habitually affect their theology” (p 247).

Hinze notes three additional considerations, in the light of his case study analysis. First, people need to be taught the habits of dialogue – developing the abilities to speak well and listen well. Secondly, “the authority of the church, and the personal authority of individual leaders in the
church, is increased and enhanced to the degree that a dialogical process of collective discernment and deliberation has been involved in developing teachings and designing strategic pastoral plans” (p 257). Finally, Hinze asks: “Can dialogue not only affirm the truth that has already been articulated by the magisterium and received by all the faithful but also draw the church, often through conflict, into new insights into the tradition” (p 261)?

We have seen that, although Pope John Paul II opened the door to decentralization (therefore, shared responsibility) in *Ut unum sint*, the Church still struggles with implementing a dialogic culture. Many church leaders use the word in speeches, but, as Hinze has shown, the reality on the ground does not reflect this talk about dialogue.

There is no doubt, however, about dialogic communications in our digital culture globally. Multimedia and multi-sensorial communication challenge print- and text-based transmission and the producer-centered construction of meaning. There are many new ways of communicating today. Media are no longer *instruments of transmission*; rather they are *integral* to the meaning and construction of culture. Computer and communication technologies have merged into huge but highly personalized networks. These webs of relationships and interactivity are new challenges for churches. And those interactive webs were a factor, as the Pope landed on U.S. soil.

The global media were perhaps surprised by the world-wide appetite for media coverage of the death of Pope John Paul II and the selection of a new Pope. With the iconic pageantry associated with both, and with the global affection for our previous Pope, it should not have been a surprise. CNN and other media outlets followed the above stories extensively, offering viewers many, many hours of live complete coverage. Pope Benedict was called a “shy scholar and teacher” in contrast to the rock star presence of his predecessor. However, apparently this pontiff had his own appeal to audiences and media gave extensive, almost constant, coverage of his U.S. visit. The media environment that covered the Pope’s visit was thorough, but it also allowed communication feedback.

All the media – newspapers, magazines, TV and radio, and, especially, the Internet – now have talk-back forums – a dramatic extension of the earlier print “Letters to the Editor” feature. All these media have an Internet presence, and all feature their own staff blogs – an Internet extension of the columnist’s role. All blogs are designed for feedback and these responses flow continually. Thus, Americans had access to news, but also to dialogue in response to the papal news. And anyone could speak up.

John Allen, a noted columnist for the *National Catholic Reporter*, had a regular column delivered to Email boxes. He flew with the Pope on all his trips. During the U.S. visit one could download daily audio conversations between Allen and his editor about the events. The Sisters of
Mercy (and many other religious groups) blogged regularly. A well-known blogger, Rocco Palma, author of the “Whispers in the Loggia” blog, posted the complete text of all Papal addresses on his site, in addition to behind-the-scenes events and his own personal emotional responses. On the Internet, of course, individuals and media forums are released from the time and space constraints, so the full texts were shown and are still archived on many of these sites. Most people who attended papal events had their cell phones and digital cameras; they were making their own text- and visual-records.

Apart from this media environment, what were the chief characteristics of the U.S. Catholic Church at the time of the Pope’s visit?

- Catholics number 70 million, roughly ¼ of the U.S. total population.
- U.S. bishops estimate 39% of U.S. Catholics are Hispanic.
- For all religions, the situation is fluid; many join, and leave their churches.
- 62% of U.S. Catholics report the Church is not reflective of their views.
- The Church in the U.S. has paid more than 2 billion dollars to victims (and their lawyers) to settle sexual abuse claims. According to a Washington Post – ABC news poll, as the Pope arrived in the U.S., about three-quarters of U.S. Catholics disapprove of how the Church is dealing with this issue.

However, John Allen noted that in 2002, the year the sexual abuse crisis erupted in the Catholic Church, 2.7 million children were educated in Catholic schools in the U.S. In addition, ten million Americans were given assistance by Catholic Charities, and Catholic hospitals provided $2.8 billion in uncompensated charitable care (May 9, 2008).

Aware of this U.S. Catholic energy, the Pope’s official schedule included: visits to Washington DC and New York City; two outdoor stadium Masses; a White House visit; a prayer service and meeting with U.S. bishops; an address to leaders of more than 200 Catholic colleges and school-superintendents from the 195 U.S. dioceses; several addresses to the United Nations, including a talk with the staff; a meeting with Jewish leaders at a NY Synagogue; a meeting with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and other religions; a Prayer Service with leaders from other Christian denominations; a Mass in St. Patrick’s Cathedral for priests, deacons and members of religious orders; and a meeting with young Catholics, including 50 with disabilities.

Surveys by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recorded a ten-point bump in the Pope’s favorability ratings after his visit. Among Catholics it went from 74 to 83 percent. What did he do to make Americans respond so favorably?
One analyst noted that our previous Pope was a TV Pope, but Benedict XVI was an Internet Pope – one needs to print out and study his carefully-crafted texts. This interaction with the Pope’s texts is, as Hinze noted, one form of dialogue. However, I will not focus on these texts in this paper since most Americans would not have printed out the texts and studied them. However, they did listen closely as he spoke to them in large stadium Masses, in ecumenical settings, in meetings of Church leaders, and in the United Nations.

Here I will discuss three aspects of the visit that could be considered communicative dialogue:

1. the warm rapport that existed between the Pope and his audiences
2. his prayerful presence at Ground Zero, the World Trade Center disaster site
3. and, most importantly, his decision to meet with some sexual abuse victims.

Our previous Pope dramatically kissed the ground as he left the plane to visit other countries. The personal gesture of Pope Benedict is to hold out his arms as if to embrace the people he greets. The New York Post newspaper filled its front page with such a photo of the Pope with an accompanying headline: “Come to Papa.”

There was certainly a celebrity factor at work during the Pope’s visit. Yet the shy smile of the Pope (especially when carried on huge stadium TV screens) captivated Americans. And when he decided not to scold Americans but, rather, to affirm their energetic faith, he won most of their hearts. He urged his U.S. flock to be ‘counter-cultural’ and he urged United Nations leaders to intervene, when necessary, to protect human rights. But he appeared to be a pastoral leader rather than a rigid absolutist.

This “Papa” factor appeared as he spoke to Catholic educational leaders. He applauded their efforts and affirmed their work, while some had expected to be “taken to the woodshed” because so many institutions do not seem as “Catholic” as they used to be. I will speak below about the Pope’s interaction with leaders of other religions.

As I am writing this, it is September 11th. This date is seared in American memories and it meant a lot to Americans that the Pope visited Ground Zero, the site of the World Trade Center disaster. During this visit the Pope did not give a speech. Instead he offered a prayer and met personally with a small group of individuals affected by the disaster – those who had lost family members and individuals who worked to save lives there. As a communication specialist I would rank this as a key dialogic moment during the Pope’s stay in America. For here he listened, along with consoling the victims. And Americans could feel the Pope was learning something on this sacred spot; he was not just an official teacher.
The major dialogical moment of the Pope’s visit was his personal decision to meet with some sexual abuse victims from the Archdiocese of Boston. He was advised not to do this by Vatican officials who feared the American legal system might allow the Holy See to be named a defendant or “co-conspirator” in sexual abuse cases. However, the Pope had long ‘listened’ to victims; as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, since 2001 he had read all the case files of alleged acts of abuse, including transcripts of the survivors’ testimony. He was, thus, more knowledgeable on this issue than most individual U.S. bishops.

The Pope asked that a small group of victims meet with him so he could interact with them in a personal way. Two Boston archdiocesan officials (a priest and a woman who had worked extensively with victims there), coordinated arrangements. They invited individuals whom they felt could be helped by the visit. They were not chosen, however, because they were docile or non-critical. One of the individuals told the pope “there’s a cancer growing on your ministry.” As John Allen reported: “Benedict opened the session with the magic words, ‘I’m sorry.’” Allen cites two consequences of the visit. The Pope referred to the “continuing challenges this situation presents” so it cannot be considered a closed chapter in the American Church. Allen said: “Benedict has set a new standard for candor.”

There was another aspect of the 25-minute meeting. Cardinal O’Malley, the Archbishop of Boston handed the Pope a handmade book of calligraphy listing the names of over 1000 alleged victims of clergy sexual abuse from the Archdiocese of Boston. As the Pope slowly turned the pages, the Cardinal mentioned that some of the victims died from suicide or drug abuse. A person present said there was “an audible intake of breath” as the Pope looked through the pages. Each of the victims spoke individually with the Pope. There were many tears and one victim noticed, as the meeting ended, that there were tears in the Pope’s eyes.

Some were critical of this meeting because they were suspicious of the way the selection was made or they feel it was not representative of the larger group of individuals abused. Many U.S. Catholics are unhappy that bishops have not been held accountable for their role in covering up the abuse or re-assigning priest-abusers to another parish without any warning to people. Most American Catholics (and non-Catholics) were grateful for the fact that in speeches on numerous occasions the Pope brought up the sexual abuse scandal. And the personal interaction with victims was, for many, the most important dialogic moment of the Pope’s visit. On four occasions the Pope attended Mass with Catholics, many having traveled from across the country to attend. Here, and in most of his appearances he talked to the audiences instead of listening. However, there was feedback, of a sort.

The May 12th issue of the Jesuit journal America reported that during his general audience in Rome on April 30th, the Pope reported that he returned to Rome strengthened by his U.S. visit. Speaking in German without a prepared text, the Pope said that everywhere he went in the U.S.
“I was able to experience the fact that the faith is alive, that Christ is there today among the people, that he shows them the way and helps them to build the present as well as the future.” It is no accident that, contrary to previous history, three important Vatican offices are now headed by Americans. There appears to be a new appreciation at the Vatican for the American Catholic Church.

Although the shortage of time is a factor, the fact is that apparently in most of the papal appearances there was no verbal interaction. There were personal handshakes, but no extensive dialogue as the Pope met with Jewish leaders, other non-Christians and with Christian denominational leadership. Perhaps such dialogue more properly takes place in formal meetings (such as the Muslim-Catholic dialogue that will begin seriously this Fall.) However, the way these papal meetings are choreographed it appears the Pope plays the commanding role, with all others delegated to paying homage. Not very dialogical.

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church in the U.S. has entered the era of the laity. There are more individuals in training today for lay ministry roles in the Church than there are seminarians in training for the priesthood. Not only is there a shortage of priests, but there appears to be an abundance of lay ministerial candidates. These Church leaders expect to be heard in the 21st century Catholic Church. There are at least two outstanding leadership-training projects underway in the U.S. Catholic Church. One, entitled the “National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management”, will focus on excellence and best practices in church finances, management practices and human resources. As participants note, with one million employees nation-wide and combined budgets of $100 billion, the Catholic Church needs to learn from business leaders about financial disclosure, budgets, and personnel development.

Another major development project is called the “Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership” project. This is a joint effort of six national Catholic associations and is funded by the Lilly Endowment. It is designed, among other things, to find ways to encourage young people to consider a life of ministry in the Church.

It is perhaps my prejudice as one interested in Communication Theology to theorize that a dialogical culture must be implemented in the Church, not simply talked about. Thus, I was deeply inspired by the words written to U.S. Catholic bishops by Monsignor Philip J. Murnion as he was dying of Cancer. Murnion worked with the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin as they founded the Common Ground initiative – one of the dialogue studies in Bradford Hinze’s book.

Murnion’s writes: “In his splendid Apostolic Letter, Novo Millennio Ineunte, the Holy Father (Pope John Paul II) charts a pastoral vision for the Church in the new millennium. The Pope strongly urges practice of ‘the ancient pastoral wisdom which, without prejudice of their authority, encouraged pastors to listen more widely to the entire People of God’ (NMI, #45).”
Murnion adds: If I were to sum up my final plea to you, it would be: “dialogue, dialogue, dialogue.”
The U.S. Catholic Church Sexual Abuse Scandal: A Media/Religion Case Study

By Frances Forde Plude


Various chapters in that book were written by members of the International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture. I served on this Commission, a small ecumenical think tank that met with scholars and practitioners around the world to probe the challenges of being church in a digital culture. The Commission also funded fifteen doctoral scholarships in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to develop new scholars in those intersecting fields.

NOTE: Statistics cited in this text were current in 2002. Many changes occurred after that date in the statistics, revelations, and trends on this topic of sexual abuse.

The single most important person in my life has been a Roman Catholic priest who, at 86, was deep into an Alzheimer’s fog. This disease spared him from awareness of the most critical crisis to confront his Church since the Reformation. During his fifty years of service, this sensitive priest saw Catholics become major players in American culture. He rejoiced during Vatican Council days as the Church re-invented itself in relation to the modern world, along with other heady revolutions of the 1960s. And then he watched a culture of dissent descend upon his Church as Catholics disagreed strongly about how to implement the theological advances of Vatican II.

It is now clear that many priests (and others) within the Catholic Church have imposed sexual experiences on vulnerable individuals (male and female), many of them youth. This involves a relatively small percentage of priests; it is also a small percentage of sexual abuse cases among the total population. Still, the harsh reality of this scandal (and perhaps, even more, the failure of church leadership to deal appropriately with problem priests), is now eating away at the heart of Catholic culture in the United States. This commentary reviews that reality with emphasis on the role media have played in the drama.

I will attempt to analyze the situation primarily ‘from below’ rather than focusing on the perspective and the policies of the institutional Church and its leadership. Part of this experiential analysis flows from my own personal knowledge of the Catholic Church and a significant number of priests, several of whom have been unmasked as sexual abusers.
I will view this case study primarily from within the contextual arena of its media environment. My research consists of a serious review of major U.S. newspapers, radio and TV coverage, several respected Catholic journals and many Internet sites. As this media coverage accumulated certain trends emerged. I have attempted to identify these patterns and ask appropriate questions. To what extent have media reported on the issue thoroughly and without bias? How has the Catholic Church responded to media coverage? What unique role has the Internet played as a media forum? And how must the leadership in this church (and in other churches) alter media reactions and their own internal membership communication flows in the light of a global mediated environment?

An analytical lens in reviewing the media context will be questions of how dialogue or a dialectical process permeates church communication realities. What conflicts seem inherent? How can these tensions be dealt with if the Catholic Church is to heal itself and emerge once again as a major moral force in a postmodern world?

The U.S. Catholic Church Infrastructure

The Roman Catholic Church represents one of the largest religious and social service systems in all of history. As this is written, the current global Catholic population is 1.045 billion and there are 62.2 million Catholics in the United States – 22 per cent of the nation’s population.¹ There are 19,093 Catholic parishes or congregational units in the United States² and the Catholic Church sponsors 1,110 hospitals and health care facilities, 1,085 residential care facilities, 8,170 schools and 233 colleges and universities. In addition, there are 1,406 affiliated social service agencies known as Catholic Charities USA. This clearly is a potent force for faith and service in U.S. culture.

Staff personnel figures within the U.S. Catholic Church show significant trends. There are currently almost 45,000 priests but this number is down from 58,632 in 1965. There are 74,177 vowed religious Sisters, a 100,000 decrease from their 1965 figure. However, there are 30,000 laypersons or religious in various church ministries and another 30,000 in training. There are 13,000 lay deacons, 150,000 Catholic-school teachers, and 25,000 lay associates of religious orders. So the decline in vowed priests and religious is somewhat offset by a growing population of certified lay ministers.

The integration of Catholic institutions and Catholic population into U.S. culture perhaps masks three other factors. First, there is a distinctive dialectic between the American character and

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¹ All statistics are from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University and are 2002 figures.
Roman Catholicism in the U.S. The Church membership reflects the individualism, the enthusiasm, and the consumerism of Americans in general, along with the somewhat secular attitude of the American population.

Secondly, there is a dialectic within broad changes in Catholicism identified in a recent sociological study by Richard A. Schoenherr entitled Goodbye Father (Oxford University Press). He mentions a movement from dogmatism to pluralism, tension between the celibacy rule and a growing personalism of human sexuality, a strong feminist culture and growing empowerment of the laity. It is not presently clear to what extent these factors are involved in the clerical abuse scandal, but all almost certainly play a role.

The third factor, which may affect the media response to the Catholic Church sex scandal, is identified as “the new anti-Catholicism” by scholar Philip Jenkins in a book of that title. Jenkins notes that racist and anti-minority attitudes and comments are branded unacceptable in U.S. culture. However, he claims that even before the sexual abuse scandal it has been possible to indulge in anti-Catholic bias and rhetoric – beyond what could be legitimate critique. Any critical response to such prejudice is branded as Catholic Church censorship. Some analysts see some aspects of the “media frenzy” over the sexual abuse crisis as part of this anti-Catholic prejudice. While he praises The Boston Globe for their work, footnotes throughout the Jenkins book cite many examples of news stories and headlines that are grossly slanted. I would add that many of the stories were perhaps constructed to sell in a competitive news market -- along with this inherent bias.

The Scope of Ministerial Sexual Abuse

The first thing to be said about sexual abuse by church personnel is that we do not presently have solid data about the extent of the problem in the Catholic Church, in other religious groups, or in the population at large. Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune is Founder and Director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. In an article in Christian Century (26 August 1992) Fortune cites a Fuller Theological Seminary dissertation suggesting that as many as 38 per cent of ministers or clergy are sexually involved inappropriately with their congregants. This shockingly high number may not be true. If it is true, it may be the result of the vulnerability of many individuals when they approach a minister or priest about a problem; and it may simply be an abuse of pastoral power.

Concerning youth abuse in general The Economist (6 April 2002) notes: “Sex offenders who prey on children go where children are… They teach in schools, coach sports teams, run scout troops and day-care centers.” The journal cites researcher Charol Shakeshaft’s findings that 15 per cent of pupils in schools are sexually abused by a teacher or staff member between

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kindergarten and high-school graduation. Many of these institutions make private settlements and move abusers out with letters of recommendation, known as “passing the trash.”

The extent of sexual abuse cases involving U.S. Roman Catholic priests is hard to quantify. Some reasons for the lack of certitude include:

- The culture of confidentiality and secrecy in the Catholic Church
- The lack, until recently, of available court records; and
- The hesitancy of some victims to come forward.

The New York Times (12 January 2003) assembled a Catholic clergy abuse database by examining newspaper accounts and court records, along with church documents and statements. This information was checked against lists of priests assembled by victim advocacy groups and dioceses were called for further clarification. These data covered cases reported in the first year after The Boston Globe broke the sexual abuse story in January 2002. The numbers below have increased since January 2003, but they provide a snapshot of available data at that time. The New York Times database included “only ordained priests who faced specific accusations of abuse of a child.” Their figures excluded deacons, brothers, sisters, or lay persons working for the Catholic Church. Cases involving adult parishioners were also excluded.

The newspaper noted that most of the abuse cases had happened many years ago and did not involve pedophilia (adults interested in pre-pubescent children). Bishops have continually tried to clarify that the number of cases began to drop markedly by the 1990s because they did begin to address the problem. Seminary-training programs began more sophisticated psychological screening of candidates by this time and human sexuality instruction had been inserted into the seminary curriculum. These facts have often been ignored by media coverage.

The New York Times database, summarized in their 12 January 2003 edition, indicates:

- 1,205 U.S. priests had been accused
- most of the cases did not involve pedophilia
- 4,268 victims had made public claims
- most of the abuse occurred in the 1970s and 1980s
- every region of the country was seriously affected
- more than a dozen dioceses reported more than 20 cases each

John Jay College of Criminal Justice (of the City College of New York) was commissioned to do a definitive study to obtain more authoritative figures, but the researchers’ need for extensive data has alarmed many bishops. As late as 11 June 2003, Cardinal Egan of the New York Archdiocese refused to release priests’ names. He later modified his position when pressured by
clergy and after minutes of a meeting were leaked to the press by several people who felt the information should be made public.\textsuperscript{4} There is reasonable skepticism about how open the church would be about its records unless it is pressured by criminal prosecution. During a meeting of U.S. bishops in St. Louis in June 2003, the bishops assessed various efforts and met with John Jay College officials to clarify goals and procedures. At this meeting was some discussion of a national plenary meeting of the U.S. Catholic Church to deal with its current crisis.

Richard Sipe, a psychotherapist and a former priest, has counseled hundreds of clergy and victims of abuse and he expressed great respect for those who attempt to live out the celibacy charism. Sipe suggests the need for a special study of sexuality within the cult of clerical celibacy.\textsuperscript{5} He estimates that six per cent of all U.S. Catholic priests have committed youth sexual abuse. Sipe's figures are not the result of a scientific survey and are questioned by many. However, \textit{The New York Times} database shows that 6.2 per cent of priests ordained in the Archdiocese of Baltimore in the last half-century have been implicated in the abuse of minors.

In Manchester, New Hampshire the percentage is 7.7 and in Boston it is 5.3. It may be this percentage is somewhat representative of some other dioceses (although not all) if church leadership were more open and if other victims stepped forward. There may even be more victims from the decade of 1990, but many victims have not yet reached an age of maturity where they can find the courage to speak up. In an earlier study within the Archdiocese of Chicago, however, 2.6 percent of the priests were subject to complaints and 1.7 percent of the complaints were considered credible by a Review Board with solid credentials.

\textbf{Media Coverage and Response to the Coverage}

Although there has been media coverage in the past about several high-profile clergy sexual abuse cases, an investigative report about clergy sexual abuse and cover-up in the Archdiocese of Boston was released by \textit{The Boston Globe} on 6 January 2002. From the very beginning of this media coverage there was shock and rage along with great relief on the part of many victims who felt their pain was finally being acknowledged. Now that most newspapers have a Web presence, it was easy to access all the information obtained by the investigative team, along with many other helpful resources and links, at the \textit{Globe} Website. Due to the sensationalism of the report and its easy access online, this story was immediately featured on major news outlets across the U.S. and throughout the world. With multiple channels of cable news in the United States, the story was literally trumpeted 24 hours a day.

\textsuperscript{5} Sipe’s two volumes on the subject include: \textit{A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy} and \textit{Sex, Priests, and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis}, both published by Brunner/Mazel.
In Boston there were two additional factors feeding the frenzy. In its follow up book Betrayal, the Globe staff note: “(Boston) is the only major archdiocese in the U.S. where Catholics account for more than half the population. In no other major American city are Catholics more represented in political precincts, in courtrooms, in boardrooms. Nowhere else has the impact of the scandal been more deeply felt. And nowhere else has the erosion of deference traditionally shown the Church been more dramatic” (p 7). Thus, the newspaper faced the prospect of great pressure to suppress the story and the possibility of backlash by readers when it was released. Instead, Catholics generally felt gratitude for this exposure and the rage turned against Church leadership. Many of the court officials who confronted the Church in the case were prominent Catholics.

The second unique aspect of the Boston situation was that Cardinal Bernard Law, the local Church head, became a lightning rod around which the storm raged. Long a power broker in the U.S. Catholic Church (and in Rome) Law’s defiance enraged people within the media, among Catholics, and in the population at large. For the first time devoted Catholics took to the street in protests, priests began to speak out against their pastoral leader, and an organization called Voice of the Faithful [www.votf.org] began to provide a systematic way to organize for change in the Church. Many people called for Cardinal Law’s resignation and eventually he did resign from his post.

Peter Steinfels, a noted Catholic layman and one-time Religion Editor for The New York Times, noted that “between 6 Jan and mid-April (100 days) the Boston newspaper published over 250 stories, many on page one, about the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests.”

Along with the secular media coverage, it is of interest to reflect upon what Catholic media did with the story. There are three major biweekly Catholic organs. America, a Jesuit publication, is read regularly by many bishops and Catholic leaders, along with Commonweal, a respected journal published for many decades by laypersons. Both contained thoughtful and widely varied articles on the sexual abuse issue, on the ‘clerical club’ among Catholic clergy, on the issue of homosexuality within the Catholic priesthood, and on what the laity can do to provide more leadership within the Church. The biweekly newspaper National Catholic Reporter (NCR) also offered comprehensive coverage. NCR has been a leader in covering sexual issues within the Church. It exclusively broke the story of sexual abuse of some nuns in Africa by Catholic clergy there when the Church leadership in Rome continued to stall in acknowledging the problem. With correspondent John Allen Jr. on site in Rome, NCR provided Vatican commentary regularly in the newspaper and on its Website.

Other more moderate or conservative Catholic newspapers include Our Sunday Visitor and The Wanderer. The latter contained an interview about anti-Catholic bias with Philip Jenkins,

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6 “Abused by the media,” The Tablet, 14 September 2002.
mentioned above, and argued that media coverage neglected a major part of the problem – the ‘sexualization’ of American culture. These publications have Websites and their archives provide a rich, and easily accessible record of their coverage. An interesting aspect of newspaper coverage is the fact that almost every Catholic diocese in the country has its own Catholic newspaper and the local bishop is the publisher. These editors face challenges because they are both editor and public relations agent for the local bishop who usually supervises the papers content, sometimes at an arm’s length.

Before moving on to the role of the Internet in media coverage, we should review several specific critiques of the sexual abuse media coverage. One of the most effective commentaries was offered by Peter Steinfels, formerly of The New York Times. His (London) Tablet article cited above notes several problems:

- coverage gave a skewed or imprecise understanding of the issue
- coverage of the Catholic bishops was often distorted
- the “blizzard” effect of the coverage included almost no thoughtful analysis
- extracting patterns from all the data was almost impossible
- “The Church” was covered as a monolith, rather than as 194 different dioceses
- awareness and response to abuse in the culture grew slowly as well as in churches

Steinfels, a respected journalist, concluded: “… columnists settled numerous scores with the Catholic Church: from the way they were treated in parochial school to the Church’s opposition to abortion and refusal to ordain women.” He added there were virtually no counterbalancing commentary. Steinfels also noted when addressing Catholic media personnel in Los Angeles that easy access to the Globe Website meant the Boston story was echoed continually throughout the country by local reporters, becoming a template, even though many diocesan situations were vastly different.


If a reporter or a news organization was inclined toward sensationalism or anti-Catholic prejudice this story certainly provided the perfect opportunity to vent either or both. It is not unreasonable to assume this did sometimes happen. Most would agree, however, that the Catholic Church was clearly guilty of a self-inflicted wound and any attempt to control the news only made it look worse. And there was widespread recognition that the media had done a singular service to society and to the Church by providing extensive coverage of the problem. The Pulitzer Prize awarded to The Boston Globe for the sexual abuse coverage confirmed this.
The media did occasionally point out the steps taken by Church leadership to deal with the problem. These include development of:

- A Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People
- Essential Norms for Dioceses in Dealing with Allegations
- An Office of Child and Youth Protection at the Bishops’ headquarters
- An independent National Review Board
- A national audit to confirm that diocesan policies are implemented

Documentation on these issues, along with other helpful items (statements, presentations, press releases, Vatican interaction, articles, and church policy background) are available at the Website of the national office of Catholic bishops in Washington D.C. This is known as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The extensive resources available there indicate that the bishops’ national office understands the importance of having a Web presence that provides information and even helpful criticism.

**The Impact of the Internet as Forum**

It is clear to the serious researcher, as well as the public, that the Internet represents a whole new venue for data gathering, study, analysis and talk-back. In addition to other media mentioned above, the Internet engine drove this media story forward and continues to do so. The Internet is uniquely accessible and, through archived material, makes available with a mere ‘point and click’ the tracking of past media stories and an up-to-date monitoring of current coverage. There are several tools that facilitate the monitoring process. *The New York Times* offers a tracking service whereby articles from the newspaper on certain topics will be e-mailed to the subscriber automatically. Thus, all articles on the Catholic Church can be received on a regular basis.

Bill Mitchell, a Notre Dame University graduate, began another interesting tracking service. He searched the Internet twice a day for the latest coverage on clerical sexual abuse, copies the headlines, adds the name of the publication and some sentences and then links each article to a Website he runs called the “Clergy Abuse Tracker.” The site was hosted by the Poynter Institute, an ethical watchdog and training site for journalists in St. Petersburg, Florida. Mitchell called this site “part media experiment, part service to journalists and part service to the church.” Almost 1,000 users visited this clergy abuse site daily; 700 signed up for daily e-mail updates. Most were probably journalists. One mentioned that she tried to monitor smaller newspapers this way to get a sense of the impact on small towns and parishes. Mitchell, a former news editor, claimed the scandal media coverage has been “aggressive” and “impressive.” He does not believe the media are “out to get the church” but, rather, have done the church a service.
If one examined *The Boston Globe* Website you became aware of the extent of a virtual resource library. The site offered a complete archive of *Globe* coverage and various categories of information were organized for Web visitors. Categories included: the fall of Cardinal Law; the text of court depositions; the victims; the financial cost; the Church’s response; investigations and lawsuits. The site provided an extensive list of resources – direct links to media outlets, official Church sites, church reform groups, victims’ groups, the Catholic press, etc. Message boards were provided so individuals could post comments and an interactive map allowed anyone to see exactly where accused priests have been stationed. Video documentary material was provided.

This and other Websites provided a new kind of nonlinear environment for individuals to move within. Such a site is available at any time so even months after the fact one can keep current on the issue. Another Internet phenomenon is the Web Log where individuals provide journal reflections and others can respond. One such “blogspot” is entitled “Catholic and Enjoying It!” The Voice of the Faithful Website [www.votf.org] provided a continuing forum for individuals who seek a supportive group for change in the Church. VOTF goals include: to support those who have been abused; to support priests of integrity; and to shape structural change with the Catholic Church. Its site provided a list of “15 Things Any Catholic Can Do.”

Another aspect of the Internet is the work being done by colleges and universities to renew the Catholic Church in the light of the scandal. Major Catholic institutions like the University of Notre Dame and Boston College are undertaking major research and development projects to tap into the expertise at their institutions. The Boston College project is called “The Church in the 21st Century: From Crisis to Renewal.” At its Website [http://www.bc.edu/church21] one can connect with audio and video speeches, with seminar announcements, and occasional papers. Also included is an extensive research bibliography on topics such as: roles of lay men and women, priests and bishops; sexuality in the Catholic tradition and contemporary culture; handing on the faith to the next generation; and Websites for research in religion and the social sciences.

The University of Southern California Annenberg School published an online journalism review that contained a commentary entitled “A Tangled Web: New Media and the Catholic Scandals” by Stephen O’Leary. He suggested “it is possible that the Internet has changed the power balance that formerly governed the reporting of religious news.” O’Leary commented that the hard-hitting and detailed reporting of this crisis reflects a change in the news judgment of reporters and “The Internet has fundamentally altered the balance that governed the relationship between media institutions and more traditional powers such as the Church. Journalists and bishops alike are now struggling with the new realities of covering religion in the wired world.”
O’Leary’s special research focus was religious communication, including a study of religion on the Internet. He noted the Web has made detailed information and formerly secret documents from sex abuse cases available to millions of readers. Another significant change is that the Web allows people to read news in cumulative batches, thus “contributing to the perception of the problem as systemic and international in scope.” He cites the fact that the Website of a group of survivors of priests’ sexual abuse now averaged 1,000 visits per day – providing an online support group for such individuals. The Web offers many forums for both wounded and hopeful-for-change Catholics.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A few years ago, one of America’s leading Catholic figures, the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, of Chicago, was accused of sexual abuse. The day this news became public the Cardinal was on his way to a bishops’ meeting in Washington DC. He made himself available to the press answering their questions candidly under an intense media spotlight and in the face of extreme humiliation. One reporter asked him if he lived a celibate life and he answered the question. I recall he told the media he had to catch his plane to Washington, but he would be willing to continue the press conference when he got off the plane there. I will always remember this as an example of a church leader who respected the public’s right to know and the role of the media in pursuit of the facts.

It turned out that the accusation was false and was later withdrawn. In fact, in a dramatic private meeting the accuser and the Cardinal spoke of reconciliation and forgiveness. Sometime later, Bernardin met with the media again to reveal that he was losing his battle with Cancer and had a short time to live. It was reported at this meeting some members of the press wept openly. In a cover story Time magazine noted that after his diagnosis Cardinal Bernardin’s work among Cancer patients was giving all of us a lesson in how to face death.

This story presents a stark contrast to the Catholic Church sexual abuse scandal, the media frenzy that accompanied it, and the Church’s response to it. Why has this been so different? First, there is the surprising scope of the problem. Most Catholics, even people who work closely with church officials and its priests, had no idea of this problem or that it was so extensive within the culture of the Catholic Church. We simply did not expect it; the Church leadership had been effective in guarding the secret. And once the secret was out, many, many victims came forward to testify to the harm done to them. Incredible pain was present in almost every story of damaged lives. It seemed inconceivable that bishops could transfer priests around to many parishes thereby putting more and more youth in danger. The Church seemed more concerned with protecting its priests and its own reputation than in safeguarding young people.
Another major component was the resulting financial impact. It became clear the Catholic Church would have to pay many millions of dollars as lawyers represented groups of victims. Many people decided to withhold contributions to Catholic charities believing their donations would go into this huge settlement debt. Some felt the Church should sell off some of their extensive property holdings (especially large bishops’ residences) to pay the debt.

As the issue heated up (and for many years before the scandal broke) bishops were guided by their attorneys and insurance companies in responding to the problem. Sometimes victims who were abused by priests faced more pressure from church attorneys who tried to intimidate them or buy off their silence. Now victims were supported by the court system and the public and received even more strength from the victims’ own support groups.

This pressure for the Church to assume responsibility and to be accountable happened just as major U.S. corporate scandals were exposed, and government agencies and the stock market were facing similar scrutiny for negligence or misdeeds. *Time* magazine put three female whistleblowers on their persons-of-the-year cover. Americans were deeply concerned about an extensive leadership failure. In the Catholic Church this seemed to point to the need for a better process for the selection of bishops.

There is no doubt new kinds of media coverage contributed to the sense of crisis. Twenty-four-hour news outlets (cable news channels, radio and TV talk shows, the Internet) kept the story going. The drama unfolded: Cardinals were called to Rome to talk with the Pope, bishops prepared to gather in Dallas and debate a “zero tolerance” policy, and in many dioceses new cases came to light. The criminal court systems stepped up boldly to demand files from many bishops and to insist that some speak under oath about what had happened and how the church had handled cases. All this drama fed the media frenzy as testimony taken under oath by bishops appeared on the Internet.

In all this coverage there was not enough nuance or systematic analysis. Overlooked often was the fact that some cases involved actions from many years ago. The situation was labeled a pedophile crisis when very few of the cases involved young children (although some high-profile cases did). There was little analysis about the difference between legitimate confidentiality and a vast culture of secrecy. It was hard to sort out the need for forgiveness while at the same time holding abusers accountable.

As the news coverage piled up and remained online for continual reference, it became clear that there were *systemic* problems in the Church that needed to be confronted, analyzed, and reformed. Because of a culture of dissent within Catholicism (between liberals and conservatives), the sexual abuse issue became entangled in various agendas. Some said celibacy
was the problem. Some urged the Church to update its sexual theology, but some said Catholics had already absorbed too much of the sexual liberation of U.S. culture (and media).

Laypersons in the church, both male and female, began to see they needed to accept responsibility for their Church, rather than submissively allowing ‘the clerical club’ to manage the institution’s structure. Many acknowledged that – apart from any specific church teaching or dogma – much needed to be changed in the Church’s management system, including financial transparency and its structure of leadership and decision making. In a thoughtful analysis in Commonweal magazine (20 June 2003), theologian Luke Timothy Johnson addressed changes within Catholic culture in recent decades in the United States. Johnson noted this is pertinent to how Catholics now view sex and sexual morality. He accused the Catholic Church of incoherence in its teaching, along with corruptive abuse of power, refusing to discern its sexual morality by listening to views of women and the laity at large.

I have monitored this matter primarily from a communication perspective. Apart from the question of who should be selected for priesthood and whether they should marry, the Church seemed to be a dysfunctional communication system with excessive secrecy, almost no transparency, and a somewhat arrogant lack of accountability. I have written before that interactive communication tools seem to be a metaphor for a more dialogic Church. It now seems clear it is not simply a matter of dialogue – of talking and listening more. Rather the Catholic Church (and other churches) must become more comfortable as a dialectical system. In the language of cybernetic theory, they must accept inputs and respond with appropriate outputs, to keep their systems in balance. (Again, we are not talking here primarily about doctrine, but about organizational communication structures.)

A first step will be truly listening. People continue to say about some of the bishops: “They simply don’t get it!” As bishops refused to allow Voice of the Faithful groups (and others) to meet on church property they demonstrated their unwillingness to listen to their own people. In their approach to the media, church officials have sometimes scolded media personnel as if they were naughty children. There are legitimate media concerns and criticism; these problems need to be addressed. Many leading U.S. media figures are caring Catholics. Why not invite them to share some of their ideas and suggestions about how the Church can be a better communicator? The bishops do have a Communication Committee, but the current situation calls for more widespread input and expertise. The problem is trust and credibility, not just public relations. The Catholic Church in the U.S. can benefit from the cleansing that will occur. Recognizing that the public is media-savvy, churches can utilize modern telecommunication tools to be communicative, rather than just controlling packaged messages.

The late Cardinal Bernardin inspired a project entitled the Catholic Common Ground Initiative. The goal was to have a dialogic forum within the Church. In a newsletter (3 December 2001) the
group published an interview entitled “Theology and Dialogue in Today’s Church.” The speaker was Rev. Ladislas Örsy, a respected Jesuit canon law expert. He commented: “Dialogue is, and must be, part and parcel of the life of a Christian community because no one person has the privilege to possess the divine mysteries in their fullness and to have the final words about them. The mysteries were given to the whole community.”

My treasured priest-friend with Alzheimer’s suffered his own medical disorder and chaos. However, a seriously disordered world needs to hear prophetic voices. The challenge now is for other individual to take up this work.
El Escándalo Del Abuso Sexual En La Iglesia Católica De Los Estados Unidos: Medios De Comunicación Y Religión: Un Estudio De Caso

Frances Forde Plude

La mayoría de los sacerdotes católicos vivos hoy en los Estados Unidos han sido testigos de muchos cambios al interior de su Iglesia. Han visto católicos que han llegado a ser protagonistas en la cultura estadounidense. Han visto cómo la Iglesia se reinaventa a sí misma frente al mundo moderno y en concordancia con otras revoluciones importantes de los años sesenta. Han visto cómo una cultura del disenso se trasmina en la institución debido a los profundos desacuerdos entre teólogos y otros miembros de la Iglesia sobre el modo de implementar el Concilio Vaticano II.

Hoy la Iglesia Católica Romana está viviendo una de sus crisis más profundas desde los años de la Reforma. Está claro que un número considerable de sacerdotes y algunos laicos pertenecientes a la Iglesia han forzado a individuos (hombres y mujeres), muchos de ellos muy jóvenes y vulnerables, a vivir experiencias sexuales. En esto está implicado un porcentaje relativamente pequeño del total de los sacerdotes y representa un porcentaje también pequeño de casos de abuso sexual dentro de la población total. Aun así, la cruda realidad de este escándalo, y lo que es más significativo, la incapacidad de los líderes de la Iglesia para enfrentar adecuadamente este problema de los sacerdotes están haciendo una profunda mella en el corazón de la cultura católica en los Estados Unidos. Me propongo presentar un estudio del papel que han jugado los medios en este drama que todavía está vigente y de cómo deberían responder las Iglesias al nuevo entorno mediático.

Intentaré analizar la situación desde la perspectiva laica y no desde la perspectiva y las políticas de la Iglesia institucional y de sus líderes. Este análisis se basa en mi conocimiento personal de la Iglesia Católica y de un número considerable de sacerdotes, muchos de los cuales han sido descubiertos como abusadores sexuales. Lo que me propongo es observar estos escándalos a la luz de un contexto mediático nuevo. Mi análisis incluye el estudio de algunos periódicos estadounidenses, del cubrimiento de la televisión, de algunos periódicos católicos y de algunos sitios de Internet. También echaré mano del conocimiento que me dan varias décadas dedicadas al estudio de prácticas de comunicación de la Iglesia Católica. A medida que el cubrimiento que hicieron los medios del fenómeno del abuso sexual se fue acumulando salieron a relucir ciertas tendencias. He intentado identificar estos patrones comunes y plantear preguntas apropiadas. ¿Hasta qué punto han jugado los medios un papel fundamental al poner al descubierto un secreto tan bien guardado? ¿Han hecho los medios un cubrimiento profundo e imparcial del problema? ¿Cómo ha respondido la Iglesia Católica a este cubrimiento? ¿Qué papel ha jugado Internet como foro de discusión? Y, lo que tal vez es más importante, ¿cómo deberían los líderes de ésta
y de otras Iglesias modificar sus prácticas en los medios y el flujo de comunicación interna a la luz de un entorno global, competitivo y mediático con su nueva cultura interactiva?

Al estudiar el contexto de los medios tenemos que preguntarnos cómo debería permear un proceso dialógico o dialéctico la realidad comunicativa de la Iglesia. ¿Qué conflictos parecen inherentes a este entorno interactivo? ¿Cómo enfrentar estas tensiones si la Iglesia Católica necesita que la herida cicatrice para poder salir avante con mayor fuerza moral en un mundo postmoderno?

El Entorno Mediático Transformado

Hoy en día el entorno mediático tiene tres características pertinentes para nuestra discusión:

1. Tenemos ahora una nueva manera de estudiar cómo comunica la gente su experiencia religiosa personal a través de los medios

Stewart Hoover ha expresado con claridad que los medios y la religión se entrecruzan más y más ahora que la gente busca un sentido para su vida (2003). A medida que construimos una identidad propia buscamos una autonomía personal en lo tocante a la fe. Wade Clark Roof denomina este fenómeno “un mercado espiritual” (1999). Esto plantea desafíos a la Iglesia Católica.

Si bien la cultura moderna parece secularizada, de hecho las entrevistas hechas para la investigación muestran que muchas personas construyen sentido a través de las narrativas mediáticas que interpretan y lo aplican al desarrollo de su identidad. La búsqueda religiosa, llamada mediación, se da al interior de y es modificada por los relatos de los medios: las crónicas noticiosas, los relatos de entretenimiento y las narrativas publicitarias. Aparentemente, esta es una de las maneras en las que la gente identifica su utilización de los medios como algo significativo; es decir su propia interacción interpretativa le añade sentido y objetivo a su vida.

Esta manera de enfrentar la relación audiencia-recepción de los medios es totalmente ignorada por la mayoría de las autoridades de la Iglesia, quienes siguen haciendo énfasis en que los medios son meros instrumentos que se deben utilizar para transmitir los contenidos de la evangelización. De este modo se descuida totalmente el espacio de los usos que las audiencias hacen de los medios. Los dirigentes de la Iglesia Católica necesitan ser conscientes de que la narrativa del escándalo está siendo mediada por las audiencias y no sólo por las salas de redacción. Los comunicadores de la Iglesia necesitan ponerse al día en su muy limitada comprensión del uso de los medios. Los estudios comunicacionales nos brinda ahora una visión totalmente nueva de los medios y de la cultura y de la forma en la que las audiencias median o
interpretan las narrativas de los medios en lugar de ser totalmente manipuladas por el contenido de los programas.

2. **Tenemos que reconocer la naturaleza dialógica o interactiva de los medios de comunicación.**

En mi estudio sobre el desarrollo de la comunicación interactiva desde la sociedad feudal hasta nuestra cultura postmoderna, he analizado las relaciones de los formatos de los medios con las estructuras culturales y con el pensamiento socioreligioso. Es claro que el medio impreso afectó a la cristiandad medieval al abrir espacio a las voces individuales. Mucho después las tecnologías telefónicas y de sistemas permitieron la interactividad. Por último, la diversidad cada vez mayor de canales de comunicación, especialmente de formatos que permiten la interacción, parecen facilitar la descentralización y la liberación económica, política y religiosa y la decadencia de las estructuras de autoridad jerárquica incluyendo las de las Iglesias.

A menos de que las Iglesias hoy decidan valorar realmente la retroalimentación y la comunicación de dos vías, la autoridad religiosa permanecerá cerrada justo cuando los problemas globales piden una sabiduría profética. Los católicos estadounidenses, especialmente las mujeres, están pidiendo interactuar más directamente en la administración de la Iglesia y en las estructuras organizacionales de toma de decisiones. Esto también está en proceso de negociación a un nivel teológico al interior de la Iglesia Católica. En un número de *Theological Studies*, Bradford Hinze (2000) habla de dos modos de abordar el diálogo. “Uno de ellos pone el acento en el papel de la obediencia en el diálogo de la revelación y la Iglesia...” Hinze afirma que la teología oficial de la Iglesia Católica “es representativa de esta enseñanza.” El otro pone el énfasis en “la necesidad de un diálogo abierto, colegial, consultor [...] con voces creativas, críticas y cuestionadoras, voces que han sido acalladas por años, especialmente las de las mujeres y las de las comunidades no occidentales, las de otras Iglesias cristianas (y las de) otras religiones y filosofías...” (2000: 213). El drama que va más allá de la crisis del abuso sexual tiene que ver con la construcción de una Iglesia Católica dialogal.

3. **Cuando se revelan los escándalos, los grupos de la Iglesia y los de las instituciones de los medios tienen intereses e inclinaciones profesionales divergentes. No comparten los modelos de comunicación, la retórica institucional, la forma de abordar la exposición del escándalo ni las soluciones que se buscan.**

Paul Soukup ha escrito acerca de las diversas maneras de enfrentar el escándalo asumidas por las comunidades religiosas y las organizaciones de los medios. Su análisis, aunque fue escrito antes de los escándalos actuales de la Iglesia Católica, puede ayudarnos a comprender por qué los grupos religiosos le temen al escándalo y por qué los medios lo consideran un atractivo particular. Soukup recurre a referencias bíblicas para mostrar que para los grupos religiosos “el
escándalo surge como una herramienta para establecer la identidad y el control social al interior de la comunidad religiosa” (1997: 224). Una razón clave para evitar el escándalo tiene que ver con la preservación de la comunidad. La otra, no obstante, puede tener que ver con el esfuerzo que hacen los hombres para preservar su poder y sus privilegios patriarcales.

Soukup afirma que los medios informativos abordan el escándalo de una manera muy diferente. Para las organizaciones de los medios, el escándalo es “un medio para extender su propio poder en la definición de la sociedad y para ubicar otras instituciones en ella. Por tanto, los medios informativos tienden a mirar el escándalo como un ejemplo de hipocresía moral y recurren a la exposición pública, incluso al ridículo para desarrollar el relato. Además, obviamente, muchas agencias de noticias utilizan el escándalo como un producto” (225) para potenciar las ventas de los medios. Este análisis, sin embargo, no hace referencia al hecho de que una de las principales funciones de los medios en las democracias, en su carácter de cuarto poder, es hacer un seguimiento activo a las contradicciones en las áreas de interés público y poner estas contradicciones en evidencia, incluso o particularmente contra los deseos de las instituciones en las que surgen estas contradicciones. Las Iglesias y los medios necesitan ser conscientes de estas ideologías en conflicto cuando cada uno de ellos responde al cubrimiento que se hace en los medios de los escándalos en la Iglesia.

La Infraestructura de la Iglesia Católica en los Estados Unidos

La Iglesia Católica Romana ha sido la representante de uno de los sistemas religiosos y de asistencia social globales más grandes a través de la historia. La población católica hoy asciende a 1,045 millones y hay 62.2 millones de católicos en los Estados Unidos; veintidós por ciento de la población total de la nación.27 Hay 19,093 parroquias católicas o unidades congregacionales en los Estados Unidos (Froehle y Gautier, 2000) y la Iglesia Católica patrocinada, 1,110 hospitales y centros de salud, 1,085 residencias, 8,170 escuelas y 223 institutos y universidades en los Estados Unidos. Además de esto hay 1,406 agencias de servicio social afiliadas conocidas como Catholic Charities USA. Es evidente que se trata de una gran fuerza de respaldo para la fe y como prestadora de servicios en la cultura estadounidense.

El número de las personas que ocupan puestos en la Iglesia Católica estadounidense muestra tendencias significativas. Actualmente hay casi 45,000 sacerdotes, pero en 1965 había 58,632. Hay 74,117 religiosas que han hecho sus votos, 100,000 menos que en 1965. Sin embargo, hay 30,000 laicos o religiosos que se ocupan de diversos ministerios en la Iglesia y hay otros 30,000 que están en formación. Hay 13,000 diáconos laicos, 150,000 maestros de escuela católicos y 25,000 laicos asociados a órdenes religiosas. Por tanto, la disminución de sacerdotes y religiosos

de alguna manera se compensa con un aumento en la población de ministros laicos certificados y comprometidos.

Descubrimos tres factores interesantes en la integración de las instituciones y la población católica en la cultura estadounidense. Primero hay una cierta contradicción entre el carácter de los estadounidenses y el catolicismo romano. Los miembros de la Iglesia reflejan el individualismo, el entusiasmo y el consumismo de los estadounidenses en general. Y, como sucede con los otros, la construcción de sentido de los católicos está atravesada por los contenidos de los medios de comunicación. Segundo, una permanente tensión refleja los grandes cambios que se han dado al interior del catolicismo y que fueron identificados en un estudio sociológico realizado hace poco por Richard A. Schoenherr llamado Goodbye Father (2002). Menciona lo siguiente: un movimiento del dogmatismo hacia el pluralismo, una tensión entre la regla del celibato y una exaltación cada vez mayor de la sexualidad humana, un movimiento feminista fuerte y un empoderamiento cada vez mayor del laicado. Estos factores hacen parte de la matriz de las enseñanzas de la Iglesia y de la cultura estadounidense.

Un tercer factor, que puede afectar el contexto de los escándalos sexuales en la Iglesia Católica, ha sido identificado como “el nuevo anti-catolicismo” por el académico Philip Jenkins en un libro que lleva ese nombre (2003). Jenkins anota que el racismo y las actitudes o comentarios negativos relacionados con las minorías son considerados inaceptables en la cultura estadounidense. Sin embargo, afirma que incluso antes del escándalo por el abuso sexual había una cierta tolerancia frente a los prejuicios anti-católicos, aquellos que iban más allá de una crítica legítima. Cualquier respuesta crítica frente a este prejuicio es denominada censura católica. Hay analistas que, como menciona Peter Steinfels, ven cierta inclinación anticatólica en el cubrimiento que han hecho algunos de los medios. Si bien Jenkins elogia el trabajo de The Boston Globe, en las notas a pie de página en su libro cita muchos ejemplos de relatos y encabezados claramente parcializados.

El Alcance del Abuso Sexual de los Ministros de la Iglesia

Lo primero que tenemos que decir en relación con el abuso sexual es que éste es perverso, causa daños para toda la vida a sus víctimas y que es necesario hacer todo lo posible para asegurarnos de que no vuelva a ocurrir, que se ha hecho justicia con las víctimas, que se les ha dado el apoyo necesario y que los abusadores sean detenidos y rindan cuentas. No tenemos en el momento cifras exactas del tamaño del problema en la Iglesia Católica, en otros grupos religiosos, en las escuelas o en la población en general. La naturaleza misma del problema dificulta la obtención de cifras exactas. El Reverendo Dr. Marie Fortune, fundador y director del Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Centro para prevención de la Violencia Sexual y Doméstica) (www cpsdv.org), cita en un artículo en Christian Century una ponencia presentada en el Fuller Theological Seminary en la que sugiere que cerca del 38 por ciento de los ministros

En relación con el abuso juvenil en general, *The Economist* (Anónimo, 2002: 27-28) anota: “Los abusadores sexuales que persiguen a los niños suelen ir adonde están los niños [...] Enseñan en las escuelas, son entrenadores de los equipos deportivos, dirigen grupos de scouts y centros de atención diaria.” En *The Economist* se cita a la investigadora Charol Shakeshaft quien descubrió que quince por ciento de los alumnos en las escuelas es víctima del abuso sexual perpetrado por los maestros o los miembros del personal directivo. Esto desde kindergarten hasta la fecha en la que se gradúan. Muchas de estas instituciones hacen arreglos privados y trasladan a los responsables del abuso sexual, no sin antes darles cartas de recomendación. Esta política se conoce con el nombre de “pasar la basura.” Es claro que el abuso de los jóvenes y la actitud encubridora relacionada con éste existe en muchas instituciones y también al interior de las familias.

Es muy difícil cuantificar el número de casos de abuso sexual perpetrado por sacerdotes católicos. Entre las razones para ello tenemos:

- la cultura de confidencialidad y de secreto en la Iglesia Católica
- la falta, hasta hace poco tiempo, de expedientes disponibles, y
- la indecisión de muchas víctimas para hacer la denuncia

*The New York Times* estableció una base de datos en la que se registran casos de abuso de los sacerdotes católicos haciendo un seguimiento de los periódicos y de los expedientes en los tribunales y la cruzó con documentos y declaraciones de la Iglesia (Goodstein, 2003). Esta información fue contrastada con las listas de los sacerdotes que habían recogido los grupos que defendían a las víctimas. A las diócesis se les pidió una aclaración posterior. Estos datos incluyen casos reportados el año después de que *The Boston Globe* publicara su primera versión del abuso sexual en enero de 2002. Las cifras que publicamos a continuación han aumentado desde enero de 2003, pero nos ofrecen una instantánea de los datos disponibles en el momento.

En la base de datos de *The New York Times* están las siguientes cifras:

- 1,205 sacerdotes estadounidenses habían sido acusados
- 4,268 víctimas habían presentado denuncias públicas
- la mayoría de los delitos de abuso se cometieron en las décadas de 1970 y 1980
- todas las regiones del país se vieron seriamente afectadas
- más de una docena de diócesis reportaron más de 20 casos cada una
Es importante anotar que la base de datos de *The New York Times* incluía “solamente sacerdotes ordenados que habían enfrentado acusaciones específicas de abuso de un niño” (Goodstein, 2003: 1, 20-21). Estas cifras no tenían en cuenta a los diáconos, a los hermanos de alguna comunidad, a las religiosas o a los laicos que trabajan en la Iglesia Católica. Los casos en los que estaban involucrados feligreses adultos tampoco estaban incluidos. El periódico anotaba que la mayoría de los casos de abuso habían tenido lugar hace muchos años y que estaban relacionados con los abusos de jóvenes adolescentes; la pedofilia (adultos interesados en niños preadolescentes) no se incluía en estos registros.

Los líderes de la Iglesia han sido persistentes en tratar de resaltar que el número de casos empezó a caer significativamente en la década de 1990 porque los obispos *comenzaron* a enfrentar el problema. También en los programas de formación en los seminarios se adoptaron métodos para hacer un estudio psicológico más sofisticado de los candidatos y en los currículos de los seminarios se incluyeron programas de instrucción en sexualidad humana. Estos hechos, con frecuencia, han sido ignorados por los medios. El John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City College de Nueva York ha sido encargado de realizar un estudio en profundidad con el fin de obtener cifras más exactas, pero la necesidad que tienen los investigadores de recoger información detallada ha alarmado a muchos obispos. Existe un escépticismo razonable acerca de qué tan dispuesta estará la Iglesia a poner sus archivos a disposición de los investigadores si no es bajo presión de la justicia criminal. En una reunión de obispos estadounidenses en San Luis en junio de 2003, los obispos se reunieron con los investigadores del John Jay College para aclarar objetivos y procedimientos.

Richard Sipe, un ex sacerdote psicoterapeuta que ha prestado sus servicios a cientos de sacerdotes y víctimas del abuso, ha manifestado su profundo respeto por quienes se esfuerzan por vivir el carisma del celibato. Sipe sugiere que es necesario realizar un estudio especial de la sexualidad dentro del culto del celibato clerical. 28 Él calcula que el seis por ciento de los sacerdotes católicos estadounidenses ha estado involucrado en el abuso sexual de jóvenes. Las cifras que maneja Sipe no provienen de investigaciones científicas y hay muchos que lo cuestionan por esto. Sin embargo, la base de datos de *The New York Times* muestra que 6.2 por ciento de los sacerdotes ordenados en la Arquidiócesis de Baltimore en la última mitad del siglo pasado se han visto implicados en el abuso de menores. En Manchester, New Hampshire, el porcentaje es 7.7 por ciento y en Boston es 5.3 por ciento. Es posible que este porcentaje sea, de alguna manera, representativo de algunas otras diócesis (aunque no todas) si los líderes de la Iglesia fueran más abiertos y otras víctimas se decidieran a declarar. Es posible que haya más víctimas de la década de los noventa, pero muchas de éstas todavía no tienen una edad suficiente que les permita hacer acopio de valor para hablar. Sin embargo, en un estudio que se realizó

antes en la Arquidiócesis de Chicago, se encontró que 2.6 por ciento de los sacerdotes había sido señalado y una Junta Revisora de idoneidad comprobada disminuyó este total a un 1.7 por ciento.

**Cubrimiento de los Medios y Respuesta a este Cubrimiento**

Aunque los medios han cubierto en el pasado casos muy sobresalientes de abuso sexual de los sacerdotes, un informe realizado a partir de una investigación sistemática del abuso sexual de los sacerdotes y de la actitud encubridora de la Arquidiócesis de Boston fue publicado por *The Boston Globe* (Globe Spotlight Team, 2002: 1). Esto produjo desde el principio ira y asombro junto con un gran alivio de parte de muchas víctimas que sintieron que su dolor por fin había encontrado eco. En la página web de *The Globe* es fácil acceder a toda la información que obtuvo el equipo investigador junto con otros recursos y links muy útiles. Debido a la magnitud del problema y a la facilidad para acceder a la información en la red, esta historia fue publicada en los espacios noticiosos más importantes del país y el mundo entero. Con múltiples canales de noticias a través del cable en los Estados Unidos, la historia fue literalmente anunciada con bombo y platillos veinticuatro horas al día.29

Steinfels, un laico católico prominente que había sido editor de *The New York Times* afirmó que “entre el 6 de enero y mediados de abril (cien días) el periódico de Boston publicó más de 250 historias, muchas de ellas en primera plana, acerca del abuso sexual contra menores perpetrado por sacerdotes católicos” (2002: 9). Todo esto y mucho más todavía está disponible en la página web del *Globe*.

Es interesante reflexionar acerca del papel que jugaron los medios católicos. Hay varias publicaciones católicas quincenales, por ejemplo, *America* (http://www.americapress.org), una publicación de los jesuitas que es leída con regularidad por muchos obispos y líderes católicos, y *Commonweal* (http://www.comonwealmagazine.org), una revista de laicos que ya tiene unas

[29] En Boston dos factores adicionales contribuyeron a aumentar el frenesí. En *Betrayal* (2003) el libro que publicó el *Boston Globe* se afirma: “[Boston] es la única arquidiócesis importante en los Estados Unidos en donde los católicos son más de la mitad de la población. En ninguna otra de las ciudades estadounidenses grandes hay más católicos representados en los espacios políticos, en los tribunales de justicia, en las juntas directivas. No hay ninguna otra ciudad en la que el escándalo se hubiera sentido con más hondura. Tampoco hay ninguna otra zona en la que se erosionara tanto la deferencia con la que tradicionalmente se trata a la Iglesia” (p.7). Por tanto, el periódico enfrentó tanto la posibilidad de ser sometido a una gran presión para que callara la historia como la de una reacción violenta de los lectores. Por el contrario, los católicos agradecieron la publicación y su encono se dirigió contra los líderes de la Iglesia. Muchos de los jueces y de los abogados de las víctimas que enfrentaron la Iglesia en el caso eran católicos muy conocidos. El segundo aspecto que hace que el caso de Boston fuera único es que el Cardenal Bernard Law, cabeza de la Iglesia local, se convirtió en el pararrayos que recibió el impacto de la tormenta. Durante muchos años fue uno de los representantes de la Iglesia con más poder tanto local como en Roma, su actitud encorazonó a la gente de los medios, a los católicos y a la población en general. Por primera vez católicos devotos salieron a la calle a protestar, los sacerdotes empezaron a hablar contra su pastor y una organización denominada *La voz de los fieles* (Voice of the Faithful) (http://www.votf.org) empezó a proporcionar una ruta sistemática para organizarse para lograr un cambio en la Iglesia. Mucha gente pidió la dimisión del Cardenal Law quien finalmente renunció a su cargo.
cuantas décadas y es muy respetada. En las dos se publicaron artículos serios y muy variados sobre la cuestión del abuso sexual: acerca del “club de curas” del clero católico, acerca de la homosexualidad dentro de los sacerdotes católicos, y acerca de lo que pueden hacer los laicos para ejercer un mayor liderazgo dentro de la Iglesia. El periódico quincenal *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) ([http://www.nathcath.com](http://www.nathcath.com)) también hizo un cubrimiento amplio.30 Otros periódicos católicos más moderados o conservadores son *Our Sunday Visitor* y *The Wanderer*. En este último fue publicada la entrevista, antes mencionada, con Philip Jenkins acerca del sesgo anticatólico. *The Wanderer* también planteó que el cubrimiento de la prensa dejó de lado una parte muy importante del problema: la “sexualización” de la cultura estadounidense. Todas estas publicaciones tienen una versión en la web y sus archivos proporcionan un registro de su cubrimiento muy completo y de fácil acceso.

Uno de los comentarios más efectivos ha sido el de Steinfels. Su artículo en el *Tablet* (Londres) que citamos arriba menciona varios problemas:

- el cubrimiento mostró una comprensión sesgada e imprecisa del problema;
- el cubrimiento de las posturas y declaraciones de los obispos Católicos con frecuencia era distorsionado;
- el efecto “tormenta” del cubrimiento casi nunca tenía un análisis ponderado;
- sacar patrones de todos los datos era casi imposible;
- “la Iglesia” fue presentada como algo monolítico, no se tuvo en cuenta que se trataba de 194 diócesis diferentes, y
- la conciencia del problema y la respuesta al abuso creció lentamente tanto en el ambiente cultural como en la Iglesia.

Aunque sin referirse explícitamente al *Globe*, Steinfels concluye: “…los columnistas le pasaron muchas facturas a la Iglesia Católica: desde el modo en que habían sido tratados en las escuelas parroquiales hasta la oposición de la Iglesia al aborto y la negativa a ordenar mujeres” (p. 11). Añade que prácticamente no se incluyó ningún comentario que hiciera contrapeso. Al hablar con personal católico que trabajaba en medios de comunicación en Los Ángeles, Steinfels encontró que el fácil acceso a la versión digital del *Globe* hizo que la historia de Boston tuviera un eco continuo en los reporteros de todo el país y que llegara a convertirse en una especie de molde aun cuando muchas situaciones diocesanas eran muy distintas.

El Reverendo Andrew Greeley, sociólogo y novelista católico muy conocido, escribió en la edición del 20 de febrero de 2003 en la revista *America* y afirmó que el cubrimiento de *The New

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30 NCR ha sido uno de los periódicos líderes al interior de la Iglesia en el cubrimiento de cuestiones sexuales. Fue el primero en publicar la historia del abuso sexual de unas religiosas en África perpetrado por sacerdotes católicos cuando los líderes de la Iglesia en Roma seguían silenciando el problema. John Allen, Jr. es su corresponsal en Roma, lo que asegura la publicación regular de comentarios procedentes del Vaticano tanto en el periódico impreso como en su sitio web.
York Times denotaba un “anticatolicismo virulento.” El National Catholic Reporter manifestó su desacuerdo en un largo editorial titulado “Greely apunta al blanco equivocado” (2003: 4). Si un periodista o una agencia noticiosa tenía cierto prejuicio anticatólico esta cuestión le daba la oportunidad perfecta para airearlo. No es descabellado suponer que esto sucedió varias veces. La mayoría estaría de acuerdo, sin embargo, en que la Iglesia Católica fue claramente culpable al haberse autoinflingido una herida y que cualquier intento de controlar las noticias, como lo había hecho en el pasado, solamente empeoraría las cosas. También hubo un amplio reconocimiento de que los medios le habían prestado un servicio muy especial a la sociedad y a la Iglesia al hacer un amplio cubrimiento del problema. Esto se confirmó cuando le dieron a The Boston Globe el Premio Pulitzer por el cubrimiento del problema del abuso sexual.

Los medios ocasionalmente dieron a conocer los pasos que los líderes de la Iglesia dieron para enfrentar el problema. Entre ellos están el desarrollo de:

- Un estatuto para la protección de los niños y los jóvenes;
- Normas básicas para las diócesis en el caso de tener que enfrentar acusaciones;
- Una oficina para la protección de los niños y de los jóvenes en las curias episcopales;
- Una junta revisora nacional independiente; y
- una auditoría nacional para confirmar que las políticas diocesanas hayan sido implementadas.

En la página web de la Conferencia Episcopal Católica de los Estados Unidos (http://www.nccbuscc.org/comm/restoretrust.htm), está disponible toda la documentación relacionada con estas cuestiones, junto con otros elementos (declaraciones, presentaciones, boletines de prensa, interacción con el Vaticano, artículos y antecedentes de las políticas de la Iglesia). Los abundantes recursos disponibles indican que la oficina nacional de los obispos entiende la importancia de tener presencia en la web para proporcionar información e incluso alguna autocrítica.

El Impacto de Internet Como Foro de Discusión

Internet, evidentemente, constituye un recurso totalmente nuevo para recopilar información, para estudiar y para interactuar. El motor de Internet condujo el escándalo de la Iglesia y sigue haciéndolo. A través de material de archivo pone a disposición de todos, con sólo dar un “click”, el seguimiento de los sucesos publicados en los medios y la posibilidad de hacer un monitoreo actualizado del cubrimiento del tema. Bill Mitchell, egresado de la Universidad de Notre Dame que trabajó como periodista, inició un interesante servicio de seguimiento. Buscaba en Internet dos veces al día el cubrimiento más reciente de los temas relacionados con el abuso sexual del clero, copiaba los titulares, adjuntaba el nombre de la publicación y algunas de las frases y luego establecía los links de cada uno de los artículos con una página web llamada “Clergy Abuse
Tracker” (Rastreador del abuso del clero). La página fue hospedada en el sitio del Poynter Institute, un observatorio ético y sitio de entrenamiento de periodistas en St. Petersburg, Florida (http://www.poynter.org/clergyabuse/ca.htm).

Mitchell denominó este sitio “en parte experimento medial, en parte servicio al periodismo y en parte servicio a la Iglesia.” Casi mil usuarios visitaron diariamente este sitio; setecientos se han inscrito en el servicio diario de actualización por e-mail. Quizá la mayoría son periodistas. Una usuaria mencionó que había intentado monitorizar a los periódicos más pequeños para hacerse una idea del impacto producido en las poblaciones y parroquias chicas. Para Mitchell, quien había sido editor de noticias, el cubrimiento del escándalo por parte de los medios ha sido “agresivo” y “muy impresionante.” No cree que los medios “estén persiguiendo a la Iglesia”, sino que más bien le han prestado un servicio.

La University of Southern California Annenberg School publica una revista de periodismo online (http://www.oj.org/ojr/ethics/1028655580.php) que contiene un comentario escrito por Stephen O’Leary que se titula “A Tangled Web: New Media and the Catholic Scandals” (Una enmarañada red: nuevos medios de comunicación y los escándalos católicos). Él sugiere que “es posible que Internet haya cambiado el balance de poder que regía antes la transmisión de noticias religiosas” (p.1). O’Leary comenta que la dureza y los informes detallados de esta crisis reflejan...

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31 Si examinamos la página web de The Boston Globe (http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse) nos damos cuenta del amplio espectro que tiene una biblioteca virtual. La página ofrece a sus visitantes un archivo completo del cubrimiento de Globe y una organización de diversas categorías de información. Entre estas encontramos: la caída del Cardenal Law, los textos de las declaraciones legales, las víctimas, los costos financieros, la respuesta de la Iglesia, investigaciones y demandas. Además la página ofrece una lista extensa de recursos, proporciona links directos con los distintos medios, páginas oficiales de la Iglesia, grupos de reforma de la Iglesia, grupos de víctimas, prensa católica, etc. Se ofrecen tableros de mensajes para que los individuos puedan colocar sus comentarios y un mapa interactivo que permite a cualquier persona ver exactamente a dónde han sido enviados los sacerdotes acusados. También se proporciona material documental en videos. Esta página y otras ofrecen un nuevo tipo de espacio no lineal para que los individuos se desplacen en él. Una página como ésta está disponible a todas horas, así incluso meses después de los hechos es posible mantenerse al día. Otro fenómeno de Internet son los weblogs, en ellos los individuos proporcionan sus reflexiones y otros les pueden responder. Uno de estos blogs se llama “Catholic and Enjoying It!” (¡Católico y lo disfruto!) (http://www.markshea.blogspot.com). La página web Voice of the Faithful (http://www.votf.org) ofrece un foro permanente para aquellos que buscan un grupo de apoyo para introducir cambios en la Iglesia. Entre los objetivos de VOTF están: apoyar a quienes han sido víctimas del abuso, apoyar a los sacerdotes que intentan conservar su integridad, y darle forma a un cambio estructural con la Iglesia Católica. Su página ofrece una lista de “quince cosas que cualquier católico puede hacer.”

Otros aspecto de Internet es el trabajo que se está realizando en institutos y universidades para renovar la Iglesia Católica a la luz del escándalo. Instituciones Católicas importantes como la Universidad de Notre Dame y el Boston College se han comprometido con el desarrollo de proyectos de investigación de gran envergadura para sacar provecho de la experiencia que tienen sus instituciones. El proyecto del Boston College se llama “The Church in the 21st Century: From Crisis to Renewal” (La Iglesia en el siglo XXI: de la crisis a la renovación). Es posible acceder a su página web (http://www.bc.edu/church21) en la que a través de audio y de video se pueden escuchar las ponencias, verificar las ofertas de seminarios y otras publicaciones ocasionales. También está disponible una bibliografía extensa acerca de temas como: los roles de los laicos, hombres y mujeres, de los sacerdotes y los obispos; la sexualidad en la tradición católica y en la cultura contemporánea; transmitir la fe a las nuevas generaciones; y páginas web para hacer investigación en religión y ciencias sociales.
un cambio en la manera de juzgar las noticias de los periodistas y que “Internet ha modificado radicalmente el equilibrio que regía las relaciones entre las instituciones de los medios y otros poderes más tradicionales como la Iglesia. Los periodistas y los obispos están luchando con las nuevas realidades que plantea el cubrimiento de la religión en el mundo de la red” (p.2).

La investigación especial de O’Leary está orientada hacia la comunicación religiosa e incluye un estudio de la religión en Internet. Afirma que la red ha puesto a disposición de millones de lectores información detallada y documentos antes secretos acerca del escándalo del abuso sexual. Otro cambio importante es que la web permite que la gente lea las noticias en tandas y por tanto “contribuye a la percepción del problema como algo sistémico y de alcance internacional.” Hace alusión al hecho de que la página web de un grupo de sobrevivientes del abuso sexual perpetrado por sacerdotes tiene hoy un promedio de mil visitas al día y que proporciona grupos de apoyo online para estos individuos. La web ofrece muchos foros tanto para los católicos perjudicados como para los que tienen la esperanza de que las cosas cambien.

**Conclusión: El Nuevo Entorno Mediático Para la Práctica Religiosa**

Hace pocos años una de las figuras más importantes de la Iglesia Católica en los Estados Unidos, el difunto Cardenal Joseph Bernardin, de Chicago, fue acusado de abuso sexual. El día en que se publicó esta noticia el Cardenal estaba en camino hacia una reunión de obispos en Washington D.C. Él mismo se presentó a la prensa, respondió francamente a sus preguntas y fue el blanco de las miradas de los medios, lo que le causó una humillación extrema. Uno de los reporteros le preguntó si vivía el celibato y él respondió la pregunta. Recuerdo que les dijo a los medios que tenía que tomar el avión para Washington pero que estaba dispuesto a continuar con la conferencia de prensa en cuanto se bajara del avión. Siempre recordaré esto como el ejemplo de un líder de la Iglesia que respetaba el derecho que el público tenía a estar informado y el papel de los medios en el seguimiento de los hechos.

La acusación era falsa y por tanto fue retirada. Más tarde, en una reunión privada que resultó dramática, el acusador y el Cardenal hablaron de reconciliación y de perdón. Cierto tiempo después, Bernardin se reunió de nuevo con los medios para revelar que estaba perdiendo la batalla contra el cáncer y que tenía poco tiempo de vida. Se supo que en esta reunión algunos miembros de la prensa no pudieron contener el llanto. Con Bernardin en portada, la revista *Time* comentó que el Cardenal, después de que se le diagnosticó el cáncer, se dio a la tarea de trabajar con los pacientes de esta enfermedad, y que al hacerlo nos dio una lección a todos nosotros sobre cómo enfrentar la muerte.

Esta historia presenta un agudo contraste con lo que fueron las relaciones de la Iglesia Católica con los medios durante la crisis del abuso sexual. ¿A qué se debe la diferencia? Primero, el sorprendente alcance del asunto. La mayoría de los católicos, incluso aquellos que trabajan muy
de cerca con los dirigentes y con los sacerdotes en las parroquias, no tenían idea del problema o de su tamaño. Simplemente no sospechábamos que esto estuviera pasando. El liderazgo de la Iglesia había sido muy eficaz en mantener el secreto. Y una vez que la cuestión fue revelada, muchas, muchas víctimas se atrevieron a dar testimonio del daño que se les había causado. Era casi increíble el dolor que contenían casi todos estos relatos de vidas heridas. Parecía inconcebible que los obispos pudieran transferir sacerdotes a otras parroquias, con lo que ponían en riesgo a muchos otros jóvenes. La Iglesia parecía más preocupada por proteger a sus sacerdotes y por evitar el escándalo que por salvaguardar a sus jóvenes.

Otros ingredientes importantes fueron el impacto financiero que se produjo. Se hizo claro que la Iglesia Católica iba a tener que pagar muchos, muchos millones de dólares a los abogados que representaban a las víctimas. Mucha gente decidió suspender sus aportaciones a las obras de caridad de la Iglesia porque creían que su dinero iba a terminar siendo invertido en el pago de estas deudas millonarias. Muchos opinaban que la Iglesia debía vender algunas de sus propiedades (especialmente las enormes residencias de los obispos) para pagar la deuda.

A medida que el problema se hacía más candente y, durante muchos años después de que se suscitara el escándalo, los obispos habían sido orientados por sus abogados y por las compañías de seguros de su respuesta al problema. Algunas veces, las víctimas del abuso de los sacerdotes enfrentaban una enorme presión por parte de los abogados que trataban de intimidarlos o de comprar su silencio. Ahora las víctimas contaban con el apoyo del sistema judicial y del público en general y se vieron fortalecidas por los grupos de apoyo formados por ellos mismos.

Esta presión para que la Iglesia asumiera la responsabilidad y rindiera cuentas tuvo lugar al tiempo que se exhibían los escándalos de algunas de las corporaciones más grandes y de agencias gubernamentales de los Estados Unidos; además el mercado de la bolsa también estaba sujeto a un escrutinio similar por negligencia o malos manejos. La revista Time incluyó los nombres de tres mujeres que estuvieron a la cabeza de las denuncias dentro del grupo de personas que ocuparon la portada de la edición que eligió a los personajes del año. Los estadounidenses estaban muy preocupados por el fracaso de un número considerable de sus líderes. En la Iglesia Católica esto se tradujo en la necesidad de realizar un proceso más cuidadoso para la selección de obispos.

No hay duda de que la nueva cultura mediática contribuyó a la percepción de esta crisis. Durante veinticuatro horas los distintos medios informativos (canales de noticias por cable, la radio, los “talk shows” en televisión, Internet) mantuvieron presente el tema. El drama explotó: los cardenales fueron llamados a Roma para entrevistarse con el Papa, los obispos prepararon una reunión en Dallas en la que se debatiría una política de “cero tolerancia” y en muchas diócesis salieron a la luz nuevos casos. El sistema de justicia criminal se involucró cuando los abogados

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32 Las diócesis de Louisville y de Boston tuvieron que pagar 25 y 85 millones de dólares respectivamente.
de las víctimas empezaron a exigir a muchos obispos la entrega de archivos y a llamarlos a declarar bajo juramento sobre lo sucedido y la forma en la que la Iglesia había manejado los casos. Todo este drama alimentó el cubrimiento de los medios porque el testimonio bajo juramento de los obispos fue publicado en Internet.

Todo este cubrimiento careció de los matices necesarios y de un análisis sistemático. Casi siempre se pasó por alto el hecho de que algunos casos se referían a hechos de muchos años atrás. Se habló todo el tiempo de la crisis de la pedofilia cuando muy pocos de los casos involucraban a niños pequeños (aunque sí se dieron algunos casos sobresalientes). También hubo muy poco análisis para diferenciar entre una confidencialidad legítima y una amplia cultura del secreto. Era difícil hablar de la necesidad de perdón y a la vez responsabilizar a los culpables.

A medida que el cubrimiento de los noticieros se hacía mayor y la información permanecía online para referencia permanente, se hizo claro que había problemas sistémicos en la Iglesia que debían ser enfrentados, analizados y corregidos. Entre estos estaban:

- Considerar a los sacerdotes y a los obispos como una fraternidad exenta de la rendición de cuentas.
- La existencia de un clima de secreto y de protección que respaldaba esta falta de rendición de cuentas.
- Una falta de respeto a las voces de los laicos (con frecuencia las madres) que se quejaban, y
- Una ambivalencia en la población católica acerca de la enseñanza sexual de la Iglesia.

Debido a la cultura del disenso entre los católicos liberales y los conservadores, la cuestión del abuso sexual se enredó en agendas de otra índole. Algunos afirmaban que el problema era el celibato. Otros exigían con fuerza que la Iglesia actualizara su teología acerca de la sexualidad, pero muchos que se decían católicos ya habían hecho suya buena parte de la liberación sexual existente en la cultura y en los medios estadounidenses.

Los laicos en la Iglesia, tanto hombres como mujeres, empezaron a ver la necesidad de aceptar su responsabilidad como Iglesia en lugar de permitir sumisamente que el “club clerical” manejará totalmente las estructuras de la institución. Muchos reconocieron que, fuera de algunas enseñanzas o dogmas específicos, había necesidad de introducir muchos cambios en el sistema administrativo de la Iglesia, incluyendo la transparencia en el manejo financiero y en su estructura de liderazgo y de toma de decisiones. En un análisis muy ponderado en la revista *Commonweal*, el teólogo Luke Timothy Johnson hizo referencia a los cambios dentro de la cultura católica en las últimas décadas en los Estados Unidos (2003: 11). Johnson afirma que esto tiene que ver con la manera en la que los católicos ven el sexo y la moral sexual. Acusó a la Iglesia Católica de incoherencia en sus enseñanzas de la sexualidad junto con un abuso de poder
corruptor, que rehúsa escuchar los planteamientos de las mujeres y de otros laicos para revisar su moral sexual.

Yo le he seguido la pista a este asunto desde la perspectiva de la comunicación. Independientemente de la cuestión de quiénes deben ser sacerdotes y si ellos deben o no casarse, la Iglesia parece ser un sistema de comunicación disfuncional con una tendencia exagerada a la secrecía, una casi nula transparencia y con una arrogante falta de rendición de cuentas. En otros trabajos he afirmado que las herramientas de comunicación interactiva parecen ser una metáfora de una Iglesia más dialógica (Plude, 1992, 1994, 1996); ahora parece estar claro que no se trata simplemente de una cuestión de diálogo, de hablar y escuchar más. Más bien, tanto la Iglesia Católica como otras Iglesias deberían asumirse como *sistemas dialécticos*. En el lenguaje de la teoría cibernética, ellas deben aceptar los *inputs* y responder con *outputs* adecuados con el fin de mantener el equilibrio del sistema. De nuevo, no estamos hablando de doctrina, sino de estructuras de comunicación organizacional.

Es vital para las autoridades de la Iglesias que escuchen de verdad. La gente todavía dice que algunos de los obispos “sencillamente no lo han captado.” Mientras que los obispos sigan negándose a permitir que los grupos que pertenecen a la *Voz de los fieles* y otros grupos se reúnan en espacios de propiedad de la Iglesia están demostrando su falta de disposición a escuchar a su propia gente. En su trato con los medios, los dirigentes de la Iglesia a veces han reprendido al personal que trabaja en ellos como si fueran niños desobedientes. Hay preocupaciones reales y muchas críticas que se pueden hacer al papel de los medios, son problemas que deben afrontarse. Pero también es cierto que muchas de las figuras mediáticas más importantes en los Estados Unidos son católicos creyentes bien preparados. Deberían ser invitados con frecuencia para compartir sus ideas y sugerencias para que la Iglesia pueda ser una mejor comunicadora. Los obispos tienen un Comité de Comunicaciones pero la situación actual exige más conocimientos y mayor pericia. Hay un problema de confianza y credibilidad, no se trata exclusivamente de saber llevar unas relaciones públicas poco conflictivas33.

La Iglesia Católica en los Estados Unidos puede beneficiarse de la limpieza que tiene que darse ahora. Si reconocen que el público en general está preparado para leer los medios, todas las Iglesias pueden utilizar las herramientas modernas de la telecomunicación para ser comunicativas, en lugar de tratar de controlar mensajes empaquetados. Como se mencionó antes, las Iglesias tienen que estudiar y ser conscientes de los énfasis más actuales sobre cómo reciben las audiencias las narrativas de los medios, qué tan interactiva se ha vuelto la cultura y cómo responden las organizaciones eclesiales y mediáticas al escándalo en los muy diversos campos.

33 En 1977 se realizaron dos investigaciones para ver cómo obtenían información los católicos de Inglaterra y los de Gales, cuál era el impacto relativo de diversas fuentes informativas y qué percepción tenían de la Iglesia Católica tanto los católicos como los no católicos. Los dos estudios mostraron que la experiencia personal era un factor clave para la percepción individual que se tenía de la Iglesia. (La experiencia en las escuelas católicas fue uno de los factores positivos casi sin excepción). Ver McDonnel, 2003.
Mencioné antes el principal impacto de la Iglesia Católica a lo largo de sus dos mil años de historia. Los dos milenios anteriores, junto con la presencia divina al interior de la Iglesia, constituyen lo que mi amigo cristiano ortodoxo me recuerda ser “la Iglesia invisible.” Hay este otro componente: las oraciones y los sacrificios que sin cesar los individuos han hecho a lo largo de los siglos para sanar tanto la herida institucional como el mundo adolorido. Toda esta presencia y todas estas oraciones seguirán haciendo parte del proceso de renovación.

El difunto Cardenal Bernandin inspiró un proyecto llamado Catholic Common Ground Initiative. La meta era disponer de un espacio de diálogo al interior de la Iglesia. En el boletín informativo del 3 de diciembre de 2001, el grupo publicó una entrevista con el Reverendo Ladislas Örsy, un jesuita muy respetado y experto en derecho canónico. Él dijo: “El diálogo es, y debe ser, parte integrante de la vida de una comunidad cristiana porque no hay nadie que tenga el privilegio de poseer la totalidad de los misterios divinos para poder dar la última palabra acerca de ellos. Los misterios fueron entregados a la comunidad entera” (p. 6).

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Connecting With The Human Spirit: The U.S. Catholic Sexual Abuse Scandal And The Internet Challenge For Global Churches

By Frances Forde Plude

[This text summarizes some current institutional communication challenges, with special reference to the Roman Catholic Church and sexual abuse scandals there, and in other churches. The paper was presented at an International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture in Louisville, Kentucky, September 1-4, 2004.]

Introduction

Recently my travels provided data and insights concerning the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe, in Germany, and in Ireland. And I have studied the U. S. Catholic Church and its communication issues for several decades. In each site, churches confront cultural and communication challenges unprecedented historically. The past example often cited, of course, is the impact of the printing press. However, today’s challenges are much more complex. The issues are certainly more regularly communicated globally by modern media. And the Internet allows interconnected conversations around these issues on an unprecedented scale.

What do the data show about churches? How do media, especially the Internet, play a role? How can churches respond? These are the issues this paper probes. I will attempt to explore three areas. First, I will summarize some current institutional challenges, with special reference to the Roman Catholic Church and the sexual abuse scandal there, and in other churches. Next, I will reflect upon the emerging impact of the Internet on religious groups as the Web and other media challenge the credibility of church leadership especially in the sexual abuse exposure. And, finally, I will present some of my own thoughts and recommendations for churches with special reference to the issue I believe to be most critical: that churches – like the media they often fear – must themselves become more interactive, more honestly communicative, more responsive. There are new dialogic communicative theories and practices emerging that can assist churches in this task. However, the challenge will be more difficult for church institutions like the Roman Catholic Church that are solidly hierarchical and somewhat resistant to change.

Components of the Church/Communication Challenge

First some general issues. A basic challenge for various churches and cultures is that the Internet and other media are so pervasive. And many religious leaders are not knowledgeable about these media and their appropriate or effective use. Religious groups have viewed media primarily as instruments, to preach or evangelize. Therefore, they stress content or the message rather than focusing on media reception – how programming is received by audience members. This is
reflected in many Catholic Church communication documents. Dr. Stewart Hoover (2003, 1997) and Dr. Lynn Schofield Clark (2003), colleagues at the University of Colorado in Boulder, have reported extensively on the issues of media reception by audiences.

In addition, quite understandably, most media viewers prefer entertainment programming to pure information-transfer. Many religious adherents are not prepared to respect this “spiritainment” aspect of media. Father Bob Bonnot has coined this term in his writings. The term refers to “media-focused attention that causes an experience of something grand, something divine, thereby stirring our deepest human longings and touching our spirit.”

Another issue is that media are not widely integrated into worship services, although congregants live in a mediated environment daily. This is ironic since media have long played a powerful role in religious ceremonies. One has only to think of the cathedral, stained glass windows, statues, the Madonna image, and Eastern Church icons, for example, to see how people of faith have long integrated the visual into their piety. The priest-sociologist, Andrew Greeley, speaks of “the Catholic imagination” in a book of that title (2000). Yet, as Tom Boomershine has noted, for the first time in history, huge corporations are in complete control of communication systems, with people of faith sitting on the sidelines. In previous times of media transition – from oral to written culture and the transfer to print culture – Christian churches were in the forefront of the change, using this leadership to transform whole cultures and to promote literacy.

Another general factor: with the rise of investigative reporting, prompted by Woodward and Bernstein in covering the U.S. Watergate scandal, churches have often adopted a defensive role when dealing with media. In the Catholic Church, the institution I am most familiar with, bishops (like others in public life) have used ‘spin’ to try to control media messages, or they have simply resisted communicating directly with media. Bishops have had a deep fear of a scandal, so they resorted to a monstrous cover-up concerning sexual abuse they knew was going on among their clergy. Ironically, this resulted in a larger global scandal and a serious loss of leadership credibility, one that will probably take decades to repair.

**Sexual Abuse by Church Personnel**

I have studied the U.S. Catholic Church sexual abuse situation, with special reference to the role of media as the scandal was uncovered and as the media continued to spotlight the issue. My analysis appears in a book entitled *Belief in media: Christianity and media in cultural perspective* (Ashgate Press, London, 2004). Here I am moving beyond that document, examining subsequent events, looking at three additional international church settings – Germany, Ireland, and Ukraine – and examining the Internet role more fully, sharing my own reflections on implications for churches.
As I stated in my chapter cited above “The first thing to be said about sexual abuse is that it is evil, it does life-long damage to those on whom it is perpetrated, and every effort needs to be made to ensure that it is halted, that victims are given justice and care, and that perpetrators are stopped and brought to account.” It is also important to refer to this as a “sexual abuse problem” rather than “a pedophile crisis.” Most victims were not children under seven years of age, although several high-profile cases involved this age group.

In the United States the John Jay College of Criminal Justice was asked to conduct an extensive study to determine: (a) the number and nature of sexual abuse allegations between 1950 and 2002; (b) information about alleged abusers; (c) the characteristics of the alleged victims; and (d) the financial impact of the abuse on the Catholic Church. The study collected data between March 2003 and February 2004. The research was based on survey data from dioceses in the U.S. and its territories (covering 97% of all diocesan priests serving between 1950 and 2002). It also collected data from 142 religious congregations (“orders”) of men and women (68% of the total number of congregations). The study used a double-blind procedure to protect the anonymity of victims and abusers.

- For the period of 1950-2002 the study found allegations of sexual abuse against a total of 4,392 priests, approximately 4% of all priests active in those years. A total of 10,667 individuals made allegations of sexual abuse.

- 56% of the priests were alleged to have abused one victim. On the other hand, 3.4% of the abusers account for 26% of the allegations, having victimized numerous individuals. 6% of those abused were under age 7; these pedophiles often had numerous victims.

- One startling fact is that, up to the date of the study’s release in 2004, the police have been contacted in connection with only 14% of the abusers.

Most of the sexual abuse cases reported have involved male victims. However, recently Margaret Kennedy wrote about “The other abuse” in The (London) Tablet [July, 2004, p.2]. She defines this “other abuse” as women who “have been sexually abused, assaulted, exploited and ‘encouraged’ into sexual relationships by clergy of all denominations.” Half of the clergy in Kennedy’s group were married men. The abuse situation often arose out of a pastoral-care setting, and the women were often abandoned as the clergyman moved on to other victims. Kennedy is the founder and chair of Ministry and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS).

Another woman, the Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune, is founder and director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. In an article in Christian Century [January 23, 1991, p. 765] Fortune cites a Fuller Theological Seminary dissertation suggesting that as many as 38 per cent of ministers or clergy are inappropriately sexually involved with their congregants.
Yet another story involved abuse by females in religious orders. Both in the United States and in Ireland, allegations have been made about sexual abuse and excessive cruelty in institutions staffed by religious congregations.

Religious and Cultural Change: Germany, Ireland, Ukraine, and the U.S.

In 2004 I was invited to a Berlin conference held to analyze similarities and differences between Catholicism in the United States and in Germany. At the conference, the priest-sociologist Andrew Greeley shared data from his new book *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (2004). Reviewing various studies that cover a total of 47,446 subjects over a span of years from 1963 to 2003, Greeley says the data show:

- A Catholic majority (even devout ones) reject the Catholic Church’s sexual teachings.

- This destabilization occurred immediately after the Second Vatican Council and affected all age cohorts, not just youth.

- Unlike these Catholics, Protestant views did not change radically. Greeley notes there should have been this change if the nineteen sixties caused the change.

- Data show that in addition to the U.S. the change affected other nations such as Poland, Italy, Eastern Europe, and Third World countries.

- There was no evidence of widespread rejection of doctrine. In many countries one sees an increase in the belief in life after death, for example.

Greeley speculates that if the Second Vatican Council’s promise of collegiality had been kept, the above conflicts might have been less serious. He suggests: “Leadership at every level should listen, listen again, and then listen some more.” This concept will be repeated below in discussing dialogue and interactivity in churches.

At the Berlin conference Dr. Rüdiger Schulz of the *Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach* shared interesting data on the dramatic decline of Catholic culture in Germany. He cited two key factors: a shift of values toward self-realization; and the reunification of Germany, where 40 years of atheist upbringing in East Germany left its mark. 39% of the previously “West German” population were members of the Catholic Church. In formerly “East Germany” 24% of the population were members of a Christian church: 4% members of the Catholic Church. Critical trends in church membership and church attendance began in Germany at the end of the 1960s. The wave of people leaving the church peaked in the early 1990s. In 1992, 193,000 Catholics left the church in Germany. In 2002 there was still a drain of 119,000 Catholics leaving the church.
The Allensbach Institute conducted an international values study in 2001, revealing many differences between Americans and Europeans. Twice as many Americans (79%) as French, English and Germans draw comfort and strength from their faith. 94% of Americans, as opposed to only 61% of all Germans, believe in God. By 2002, “the decade-long trend to perceive the church as less and less in touch with the times would appear to have halted” in Germany. Schultz notes: “The attitudes of many German Catholics to the church are characterized by an ambivalent, partly well-wishing, partly skeptical, overall view, laced with widespread indifference and disinterest. What people appreciate most about the church is the social and charitable work it performs…” People prefer “a helping Church” but reject “a demanding Church” with its required norms of behavior which conflict with an individual’s desire for self-determination in a multi-option society.

In neighboring Austria, the Catholic Church was rocked by revelations of homosexual practices and computer pornography in a seminary near Vienna. This follows earlier accusations of sexual abuse leveled against the late Cardinal Hans Hermann Groer, Archbishop of Vienna. The seminary revelation was termed a “full-scale pastoral meltdown” by the dean of the Catholic Theological Faculty at Vienna University. [The (London) Tablet, 17 July 2004, p. 28.]

The situation for churches in Eastern Europe reflects in some ways the previously mentioned challenge of integrating Eastern and Western Germany. In Ukraine, Myroslav Marynovych, Vice Rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, has spoken of various social problems there with a deteriorating effect on human rights (2004). In a society moving from Soviet paternalism and struggling to develop and implement democracy, Marynovych called the religious realm “a bulwark of freedom” in Ukraine. In addition, the plurality of churches in the country is an important guarantor of religious freedom since all churches want to protect their own rights to exist and develop. Marynovych has long been a respected human rights activist in Ukraine; he was sent to a gulag for ten years by the Soviets for these efforts. He later authored a document detailing a vision of ecumenism for his country. Expressing a view about Hungary, Gábor Bogdányi believes the Internet will play a special role in these Eastern European Churches (1997).

Ireland’s religious and cultural change has been both unique and rapid. This is documented thoroughly in Dr. Louise Fuller’s excellent study Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture (2004). Ireland’s strong Catholic Ethos emerged historically and was legitimated by the state due to political circumstances associated with the birth of the Republic of Ireland. Until recently the Catholic Church had “control of education (and) a commanding voice over the transmission of culture” in Ireland (p 4).
All of this evaporated dramatically after 1950:

…perhaps one of the most important findings of this research (is) that Irish Catholic cultural change was being influenced by a combination of forces interacting with each other over time. They included political, economic, and social changes and a radical re-orientation of Catholic theology (p 232).

Ireland’s geographic isolation, and the strong control by the Catholic Church over what was ‘allowed’, had a unique effect. Many of the intellectual currents on the continent of Europe – where churchmen from the turn of the century had to relate to a more critical and secularized laity – simply did not reach Ireland. But the scene began to change.

Economic prosperity, educational change, television, travel opportunities, foreign industry, tourism – all provided the catalysts which allowed Ireland to ‘catch up’ with her European counterparts. All of these forces coalesced in the 1960s and made for a much more sophisticated, educated, critical, Catholic laity… (p 232).

As in other nations, media had a huge impact upon the changing Catholic culture in Ireland. Fuller covers this extensively – the impact of film, early BBC broadcasts, and, eventually. Ireland’s establishment of its own national television service, RTÉ. An iconic program, the Late Late Show, mirrored the increasing critique of Catholicism as topics were openly, controversially, discussed there.

Sexual abuse scandals have also hit the Catholic Church in Ireland. In May 1992 it was revealed that Bishop Eamonn Casey of Galway had had an affair with an American divorcée, that they had a son, that he had distanced himself from the mother and child, and that church funds had perhaps been used to keep the story quiet. Bishop Casey left Ireland quickly when the news broke. Another scandal involved Father Michael Cleary, a Dublin priest who was well known because of his television work. Later the Bishop of Ferns resigned over his handling of sexual abuse in his diocese.

Media were actively involved in revealing these scandals, along with growing revelations about earlier excessive cruelty in many state institutions for children staffed by women and men of Catholic religious congregations. In January 2002 it was agreed that religious orders were to make contributions of 128 million Euro as compensation for victims. The government agreed to indemnify the religious orders against all present and future claims. The government absorbed this remaining cost since most agencies involved were state institutions. This additional cost may exceed one billion Euro. The agreement does not cover any victims of abuse by Catholic priests who are under the jurisdiction of a diocesan bishop.
One thoughtful and devout Catholic layman told me: “We placed excessive faith in church authorities; to the extent we believed in them, to that extent are we now extremely skeptical.” In the mid-nineties, opinion polls by *The Irish Times* and Ireland’s *Prime Time* television program showed that over 60-66% of Catholics still attended Mass weekly. However, 90.9% of Irish Catholics were attending at least once a week in the seventies. As Fuller notes, it is difficult to determine whether this dramatic change in Catholic religious practice is the result of the wide-ranging cultural changes in Ireland or the direct result of Church scandals.

However, as noted in the *European Values Study* in 1994, “what is striking about Ireland is not secularization [but] the emergence of the ‘new’ Catholic.” Fuller adds:

> These ‘new Catholics’ had ‘a liberal attitude to sexual matters’ and ‘an optimistic’ interpretation of religion… More independent-minded Catholics, who tailored their Catholicism to social and cultural influences other than orthodox Catholic teaching, were emerging from the late 1960s… By the 1990s, the days were over of following rules laid down by a very authoritarian Church… (p. 251).

Fuller extensively documents the theological change in Ireland because of the Second Vatican Council and fueled in Ireland by the interactive discussions in its influential religious journal, the *Furrow*.

As I surveyed and experienced Catholicism in these varied sites it seems there are three major ‘environmental’ changes. The first was recently identified by the German theologian Hermann Pottmeyer in a paper delivered at Boston College in May 2004. Pottmeyer speaks of ‘the loss of a familiarly Catholic milieu” and the “pluralization of the spheres of life.” The Catholic Church, he notes, has become just one sphere, along with many others. Another factor is increasing individualization. Pottmeyer speaks of the need for a “pastorate of intensity” in response to these changes. And he suggests we need to acknowledge that the Christian life can greatly enrich this personal or individual development.

Secondly, each nation surveyed here is moving through a vast cultural sea change: modernism, post-Communism, individualism, media saturation, to name just a few. And, thirdly, in Europe and in the U.S., Catholicism has been rocked by sexual abuse revelations.

**The Role of the Internet**

In my above-mentioned study of the media role in revealing and continually covering the sexual abuse scandal in the U.S. Catholic Church, I concluded:
In all this coverage there was not enough nuance or systematic analysis. Overlooked often was the fact that some cases involved actions from many years ago. The situation was labeled a pedophile crisis when a small number of cases involved very young children… And there was little analysis about the difference between legitimate confidentiality and a vast culture of secrecy in the church. It was hard to sort out the need for forgiveness while at the same time holding abusers accountable (p. 326).

In my research I was somewhat surprised by the impact of the archival role of the Internet as the sexual abuse story unfolded. The Boston Globe broke the story of the extensive clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston and began to store hundreds of its stories on its Website. Their archive also contained court depositions and related material. Thus, much previously secret documentation was, for the first time, easily available for journalists and the public to study.

In addition, a “Clergy Abuse Tracker” was hosted at the Poynter Institute Website. Staff member Bill Mitchell searched the Internet twice a day for the latest sexual abuse coverage, copied the headlines, added the name of the publication and some story details, and then provided a link to each story. Almost 1,000 users – many of them journalists – visited this clergy abuse Website daily. The extensive archived material, easily accessible, made it clear the Catholic Church had a systemic problem. Such archives and databases will continue to make it difficult for religious institutions to avoid accountability in the future.

Many books appeared analyzing religious utilization of the Internet. I have listed a number of these works in my “References” section. Global studies of Internet usage are happening. The UCLA World Internet Project has released initial findings, but more complete data were available on September 13, 2004, when the Internet report “10 Years, 10 Trends” was released by the new Center for the Digital Future. The initial World Internet Project findings gave a percentage of Internet users in twelve countries. The USA led with 71.1% of its population using the Internet; among those in the 16-24 age group it is 90.8%. About 60% are users in Korea, Britain and Sweden. Some interesting findings:

- Internet users spend more time in an average week socializing with friends than nonusers, exercised more, spent more time reading books (except in the U.S.) and watched less television.

- Interestingly, a high percentage of people felt the Internet did not empower them to impact government decisions (72.5% in Sweden, 53.2% in America.
In this study, under 10% of the individuals spoke of using the Internet for contact with coreligionists. (This figure may be related to the types of questions asked on this topic; see Pew Study results below).

Interestingly, in China, 11.2% of Internet users said “it increases their contact with people who share their religion – more than in any other country. This is a significant figure for citizens of a nation in which religion is officially banned.”

Now we should focus on studies by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, particularly a 2004 survey entitled “Faith Online” done by Dr. Stewart Hoover and Dr. Lynn Schofield Clark. This study found that 64% of wired Americans have used the Internet for spiritual or religious purposes. This figure is higher than previous studies on Internet use, perhaps because a new battery of questions was used to prompt Internet users’ recollections of things they do online related to spiritual activities. Key findings show:

- Approximately two-thirds of the adults who use the Internet in the United States used the Internet for faith-related matters. This represents nearly 82 million Americans. Such use includes sending or receiving Email with spiritual content, sending, or receiving, greeting cards related to religious holidays, reading news accounts of religious events and affairs, and seeking information about religious events.

- Those who use the Internet for religious or spiritual purposes are more likely to be women, white, middle aged, college educated, and relatively well-to-do.

- The “online faithful” are devout and use the Internet for personal spiritual matters. Their faith activity online seems to augment their already-strong commitments to their congregations.

- Most users are comfortable describing themselves as spiritual and religious, so Internet use does not seem to represent anti-religious-institutional attitudes.

The authors conclude:

- The study calls into question the presumption that there is a widespread practice of online religious seeking among those outside of traditional religions.

- Rather than solely communicating with their own faith groups, these online seekers use the Internet to express their own personal religious or spiritual beliefs, to seek information about their own religious traditions and the religious beliefs of others.
Online seekers now seem to maintain a foothold in both the online and offline worlds, *remaining loyal to their offline church affiliations*. However, the Internet may still eventually come to play an increasingly important role in providing resources for seeking that takes individuals outside of formal religious traditions.

The recent volume *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (Dawson and Cowan, 2004) provides many thoughtful papers on “religion online” (the presence of religious institutions) and “online religion” (related to actual religious services online). Heidi Campbell, one of the contributors to this volume, has conducted original research on “the Church in Cyberculture” sometimes called “the digital Body of Christ.” Referring to social network analysis literature, Dr. Campbell notes “a networked view of relationship is useful in examining online communities.” She speaks of various manifestations: cyber churches; e-vangelism; online prayer; and online Christian communities. The Campbell research concludes:

- Online communities are considered a *supplement* to, not a substitute for, offline Church involvement.

- Online community *supplemented* offline religion relationship.

- Many members use their online communities as a basis to critique their offline Church community. (This will be demonstrated below in relation to some Catholic Websites.)

- Online community offers new ways for churches to conceive of, and participate in, community.

The research literature has yet to address extensively two recent cyberspace phenomena: how online political activity is spurred by Internet participants, and the growing community of those who write and read Web logs (“blogs”) or listen to podcasts.

Recent election campaigns have been fueled extensively by Internet action (Rich, 2003; Shapiro, 2003). Howard Dean’s effort was based on “the MeetUp model” – assembling individuals via the Internet and organizing them to meet face-to-face for further community-building and political action, with local coordinating committees. This allowed individuals to think together, meet up, and act together. The method tried to overcome the “bowling alone” syndrome earlier defined by Robert D. Putnam – the decline in American public life. This MeetUp model was employed by two of the most successful Catholic sites: Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) and the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), both discussed below.

The Dean campaign left behind a community committed to responding to the need for continual caring, and, on the action level, it has apparently inspired a wave of new aspirants to public life.
It was an example of an Internet phenomenon that was created by young people and it may yet show us how to employ Internet community-building energetically.

The Web log phenomenon (and how to start your own) is the subject of two recent works (Blood, 2002; Editors of Perseus Publishing, 2002). Many individuals are now inclined to record thoughts and interesting links in a sort of Internet journal; they write in it daily, or several times a week. Others can visit the blog and dialogue with the author or suggest other ideas and links. This accumulates in cyberspace and allows more extensive discussion online.

Mary Hess, of Luther Seminary, Minneapolis, describes various ways to use blogs. “I started writing a weblog [http://www.religioused.org/tensegrities/] to keep track of websites I didn’t want to lose… I also found I wanted an easy way to share such sites with friends and colleagues.”

Hess adds:

But I read weblogs because they are a way into conversations that have not made it into more formal print yet. Kind of an ‘invisible college.’ One of the nice things about blogs is the authors usually have a link list in one column that cites the blogs they read regularly… I also read weblogs because some of what is written there is likely never to make it into mainstream culture spaces. I think this is one reason weblogs exploded onto the pop culture scene with the advent of the Iraq conflict. It was a way to get information the mainstream media simply were not reporting. [Media, Culture, and Religious Faith list serve, July 12, 2003.]

Two blogs I find interesting are those posted by Christopher Lydon, a former public television executive, and Sister Rose Pacatte, who hosts several blogs for commentaries on movies, television, and books.

**Catholic Culture, Dialogue, and the Internet Environment**

For a number of years my own study (and lived experience as a Roman Catholic) have led me to think and write about the possibility of a more dialogic Catholic community – called *communio* in Vatican II documents (Plude 2004, 2001, 1999, 1994).

In recent years there has been a growing movement of lay ministers in the Catholic Church. Currently there are over 30,000 lay people in ministry, with another 30,000 in training. There are over 13,000 lay deacons in the Catholic Church, 150,000 lay persons teaching in Catholic schools, and 25,000 lay associates of religious orders. As some have noted: “There isn’t a ‘vocation crisis’ in the Catholic Church; there is a Sacramental crisis.” *The 2004 Official
Catholic Directory notes that 16.5% of Catholic parishes in the U.S. and its territories (3,157 parishes) are without a resident priest. 28% of U.S. diocesan priests are listed as retired, sick, or absent, reflecting the aging of the U.S. Catholic clergy.

Concurrently, excellent books have been published on the relationship between Catholicism and culture (Dolan, 2004; Fuller, 2004; Greeley, 2004; Steinfels, 2004, 2003, Weaver, 1995). Boston College, the University of Notre Dame, and other universities, have established research centers to focus systematic research on Catholic life and the renewal of the church in the light of the sexual abuse wound and postmodern cultural realities. This body of analysis provides a lens through which we can view realities on the ground and engage in creative thinking and action for the years ahead. Other analysis can be developed on the way the Internet is spurring a shift of authority and how “the project of the Self” (as Giddens calls it) must be a factor in churches today. Institutional religious leaders, as Greeley has said, “must listen, listen again, and then listen some more.”

Dialogue as Process

Concurrently (perhaps even providentially), as churches struggle in a digital culture, new ideas seem to be emerging from the dialogic communication field. The scholar Brenda Dervin, with colleagues, notes: “Dialogue is often taken to refer to a process essential to all egalitarian social arrangements… However, despite its prevalent usage, there is relatively scant theorizing being done on dialogue, and what little there is, is rarely used.” (1993). The authors add: “We want to enlarge the idea of freedom to speak on dialogue to include not just mere voicing, but also freedom to name, freedom to create.” They suggest “it is potentially useful to call for the building of a practical theory of dialogue (that) allows for the possibility that humans can bring their resources together, learn how to honor diversity while establishing order, and invent the future.”

This theoretical analysis has a counterpart in the work of William Isaacs, of The Dialogue Project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His book Dialogue and the art of thinking together, builds upon the pioneering work of Chris Argyris of Harvard University (1999). Like Dirvan and her colleagues, Isaacs says dialogue should be about shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together (as opposed to the “debate” or “contest” modes). He urges a “breakthrough in human functioning; because of growing turbulence and interdependence we need to think together in a new way. His volume contains models of the dialogue process, but it also speaks of many practical applications in the field – with steelworkers and their management, with medical facilities learning to collaborate, and others.

On a theological level, interesting work on the dialogic appears in the work of Brad Hinze (2000), Lakeland’s work on The Liberation of the Laity (2003), and the Terence Nichols study
on hierarchy and participation in the church (1997). On a practical level, the model of the Common Ground project, founded by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, has worked at providing a dialogic forum for Catholics. In a recent Common Ground Lecture, John Allen noted the disputation level in today’s Catholic Church and speaks of the “need for shared spaces of information and conversation.” (2004)

**Catholic Internet Applications of the Dialogic**

Stephen O’Leary (2002) notes it is possible the Internet has fundamentally altered the power balance that formerly governed the reporting of religious news. He adds: “… the Web has provided a forum for a number of recently sprouted grassroots organizations that are responding to the (sexual abuse) crisis in a variety of ways… Faithful Catholics who once submitted meekly to the hierarchy are now actively using the Web to lobby for profound changes in the Church.” Here I will examine examples of such sites.

Shortly after the *Boston Globe* broke the sexual abuse story in the Archdiocese of Boston, a lay organization known as the Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) was organized. There are now 200 affiliated VOTF groups, a speakers’ bureau, publications, and much grassroots action for improvements in the Catholic Church. VOTF also has strong support from most Catholic priests who have lived lives of generous service. Recently the group has been responding to the large number of parish closings in the Archdiocese of Boston. It sponsored a Mass on the Boston Common to promote healing and unity in the light of these closings. It was the first Catholic Mass to be celebrated there since the Pope’s Mass 25 years ago and the first Mass on the Common to be called for and organized by laity. Thousands attended.

The Voice of the Faithful Website is interesting [http://www.votf.org]. Its “Contact Us” page lists 38 different VOTF links to Email, along with a mailing address and a telephone number. When I sent an Email requesting information, I received a response within ten minutes. Other features of is website includes:

- its mission formulated
- news items
- abuse survivor support information
- clergy support information
- information on the John Jay report on clergy sexual abuse
- activities for young adults (18-39)
- meeting information
- links
This Website includes links to documentation and archived material on topics such as financial transparency, oversight of bishops’ follow-up on abuse reports, statistics on parish closings, and activities related to structural change in the church. There is no doubt that Voice of the Faithful and its Website are strategic activists for revitalizing the Catholic Church. Bishops were at first very opposed to VOTF and some would not allow their chapters to meet in church buildings. This attitude has changed in some areas. It is perhaps understandable that it will take some time for Catholic church leadership to adapt to truly strong lay voices in church management; some bishops and local clergy have welcomed laity input for years, but others are struggling with this “new Catholic” in changing church culture.

Another major Web presence is the site of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). This site [http://www.snapnetwork.org] has served as a focal point for SNAP activities; perhaps more importantly, it has worked to build a supportive relationship among abuse survivors. Its news bulletins change regularly, and it has links to its mission statement, self-help materials, new SNAP chapters, regional-area activities, a speakers’ bureau, bishop-accountability materials and information about building contacts between victims and their bishops.

These Websites reflect some of the cyberdynamics phenomenon. The Web activity works to support much action-on-the-ground. It is perhaps unrealistic to expect the Internet connection alone to foster sturdy communities. However, supplemented by face-to-face contact and organization, the Internet can provide a forum for ongoing community – thinking and acting together.

There are many other Catholic Internet sites (Raymond, 2001). Most perhaps are informational only – an extension of the signboard on church properties. They provide background information on church activities, worship service times, etc. For Internet users to feel truly invited into a church community, however, there probably needs to be interactive possibilities at the Website, allowing some dialogue. One Young Adult leader in a Catholic parish in Florida told me their Website attracted 10,000 hits in one year. Without a way of communicating with someone at such a site, however, many surfers will simply move on and real contact is lost.

Here are just a few samples of other organization and sites around which religious adherents are gathering at the time I was writing this text:

- The International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology
  [http://www.uni-teubingen.de/INSeCT]

- Full text of more than 5,200 religion articles and chapters online
  [http://www.religion-online.org]
• The World Catholic Association for Communication (Signis)  
http://www.signis.net

• The Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication  
http://www.stjohn.ac.th/arc

• Benedictine Order of Monks  
http://www.osb.org

• Call to Action: Catholics working together for peace and justice  
http://www.cta-usa.org

• FutureChurch  
http://www.futurechurch.org

Many, many others could be mentioned, but these sites give a sense of a wider Internet communio at work.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I first began writing about the theological basis for a more dialogic Catholic Church long before a sexual abuse crisis occurred (Plude, 1994). When the sexual abuse wound was exposed, I wrote about the problem from a communication perspective (Plude, 2001). I noted then:

It will require systemic change to restore Church credibility and witness. We need a dialogic culture within the Church, including a new type of communication office that is well integrated into all church ministries and linked to parish communities. We need to value the media culture we all ‘swim’ in and integrate this culture into the totality of formation programs.

And after reforming our notions of the dialogic (both theoretically and “on-the-ground”) we must accept that the Catholic Church and other churches must become more comfortable as dialectical systems. In the language of cybernetic theory, they must accept inputs and respond with appropriate outputs to keep their systems in balance. This is not primarily about church doctrine; it is about organizational communication realities. I believe the Internet will continue to play a key role in these realities.

The noted scholar Cees Hamelink says it well: “there is an urgent need for an extensive public dialogue about ‘our common digital future.’” (Hamelink, 2003, p. 253).
References


Communication Theology: Some Basics

By Bernard R. Bonnot

Today no single system of thought dominates theology as Thomism once did. Theologians now use many approaches, including Thomism, within the general context set by the Second Vatican Council. This complexity interfaces with the emerging new communication technologies and their constantly novel applications, to provide abundant grist for the theological mill. To avoid spinning our reflective wheels while making no real theological advance, we must be selective. Karl Rahner, among others, advises holding our reflections close to the mysteries of faith central to the Catholic hierarchy of truths. This reflection considers communication in light of the mysteries of Trinity, Creation, Revelation, and Incarnation.

Communicators need to reflect on their communication experiences precisely as religious, as experiences of God. For Christians, that experience is in Christ and the Spirit. Theologians can encourage communicators to multiply, record and collect their reflections. Then the theologians can deepen those reflections and relate them to the corpus of traditional and contemporary theology. Feeding those deeper reflections back to communicators and the church at large will help shape the self-understanding (theoria) of communicators and their professional practice (praxis) in the context of both church and world. The entire exercise will help communications mature as a ministry.

Trinity

The most fundamental and essential teaching in the hierarchy of truths of faith is the mystery of the Trinity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #234). God, as revealed by Jesus, is three persons constituting one Godhead. Trinity sets Christian faith apart from other religions as dramatically as does the mystery of Incarnation. Contemporary theologians understand the Trinity's inner life as self-communicating love, a dynamic and intimate sharing among Three. The technical term for the result is communio, while the term for the process is circumincessio. This approach provides promising grounds for considering communication as a core ministry, one at the heart of what the Church is all about. In addition, Trinity stands as source, model, and goal of all godly and Christian communication.

The Church has long affirmed the centrality of communication in Christian faith and life, but only implicitly. Our standard explicit terms for what we are about -- apostolate, missions, making disciples, teaching, preaching, sanctifying, magisterium, and today evangelization -- veil their inner substance, communication. This has caused 'communication' to be perceived as little more than a technique and tool, something that may be used to get something important done but not something important, in itself. This perception marginalizes the ministry of communication.
in church thought, esteem and budgeting. Yet in the Trinity, communication is both process and product. *Communio* is what God is all about, the reality, the substance. Reflection on Trinity manifests how central communication is to our life as church, as indicated in the 1971 Vatican document, *Communio et progressio* (#8). This document affirms that “in the Christian faith, the unity and brotherhood of man are the chief aims of all communication and these find their source and model in the central mystery of the eternal communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live a single divine life.”

**Creation and Revelation**

Once we approach God as self-communicating trinitarian love, we see the mysteries of Creation and Revelation as part of that self-communicating dynamic. The reality in all these mysteries of faith is the same, only the dimension is different. "Trinity" references God communicating internally; Creation and Revelation refer to God communicating externally. Creation references God communicating materially, cosmically; Revelation refers to God communicating verbally, intellectually, or epistemologically. Faith reflecting on these experiences can bring into focus not only the results -- creation as object, revelation as truth -- but also the process generating those realities: God self-communicating. Modern technological developments are catalyzing that theological shift.

Humans marvel at creation and its potentialities. We constantly probe, explore, discover, and map it, transforming our wonder into knowledge. We look for new frontiers and find ways to settle into what we find. Our fascination with creation is a happy one. What intrigues us is nothing less than God self-communicating with splendiferous love. At times we get so bedazzled by the splendor that we lose sight of God.

Today, a major frontier of our fascination is, precisely, communication. We wonder at the significance of a wave of a hand, the meaning of waving flags, the power of brain waves, the reach of electronic waves. Some of today’s most significant and dramatic technological breakthroughs are our progress in the field and the incredible experiences modern communication afford. A challenge for religious communicators and theologians is to see them as religious and theological breakthroughs as well.

This is difficult. We incline to worry that the new modes of communication will alienate us from God. Theological reflection can help us bring Creation, Revelation, and the technology of modern communication together, expanding our appreciation of the many ways the Divine Communicator reveals love to us through the ceaseless wonders of creation, including its many different ‘waves.’
With this perspective, we can appreciate the Church's use of communication and our individual enjoyment of the media with the insights they occasion. We begin to cherish them as experiences of God communicating and revealing. The media are truly analogical. They participate in the nature of what they manifest. We should, therefore, appreciate the electronic media as far more than simply 'tools' enhancing some other truly worthwhile ministry. We should venerate them in ways analogical to the way we venerate vestments and vessels, icons and sanctuaries, music, and stained-glass windows. They are sacred and holy. The Church’s official publication for the liturgical rituals, the 1989 Book of Blessings, evidences this attitude by including a formal "Order for the Blessing of Centers of Social Communications." Its liturgical texts clearly connect communication with creation and revelation: lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi.

**Incarnation**

The Word became flesh, human, one of us, living among us. In Jesus, the self-communicating love of the triune God became fully revealed, tabernacling itself in a particular dimension of creation -- the human. Jesus, the head of Creation, the fullness of Revelation, is the full reality of God self-communicating humanly to humans. In Jesus, the divine Word conceived and first spoken in the womb of Trinity (God's eternal brain wave if you will) reverberated in the womb of the Virgin and vibrated forth into the womb of humankind, taking flesh, resounding among us. In Jesus, the Word expressed itself humanly, in flesh, blood, and bone, seen and sensed, loved and embraced; in movements and touches, in sights and sounds, in emotions felt and shared, like the warming waves of the sun.

Human communication is never concept and idea alone. It is the "the giving of self in love" (Communio et progressio, #11) and the giving is of, and through, body. So came God in Jesus. Labeling the mystery of Jesus as "incarnation" abstracts his reality into a truth, a dogma. It alienates us from experiencing Jesus as communication. For the reality of Incarnation is our Triune Lover self-communicating to humans as a person humanly available and as a community of persons, the Mystical Jesus, in whom, and through whom, God lives and acts. In Jesus, God shares with us face-to-face in self-sacrificing love and keeps doing so until the communication is complete, the giving is done, communio is consummated.

The reflections of communication theology help us see both communication and Incarnation as mediations. Such theological reflection will help our Church move beyond the dominance of words -- spoken or printed -- in our sharing of faith, enabling us to embrace also such media as image and personality, drama and dialogue, sitcom and story, music and dance. Reflection on the Incarnation confirms the rumor, the hunch, the insight, that these are equally valid means of communicating God's love, though less familiar. Such reflection will also validate electronically mediated forms of God’s communication. Belief in Incarnation enables us to affirm these newer modes of ministry as effective just as the traditional and mainly verbal modes of preaching,
teaching, writing and reading. Thus, one theologian/campus minister testified that the most effective medium for sharing the Gospel with today's young adults is, in a word, drama.

Theological reflection on Incarnation helps today's communicators grow into a deeper appreciation of their electronic waving of images and sounds to others. It manifests their craft as a new iconography, a holy projecting of convictions, emotions, beliefs, and experiences which others can use to open their lives to the Divine. Medieval theologians saw in Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and Perfect Icon, a *communicatio idiomatum*, an intimate exchange (*communio*) of the human and the divine. And we moderns can perceive our electronic communication as a new, and perhaps improved, way the human and divine find and enter into one another (*circumincessio*), generating *communio* with one another and God in, and through, Jesus.

Reflection on the Incarnation will incline our thoughts about communication to emphasize the Word. Thus, it is important to remember that Incarnation results from the Trinitarian missioning of both Word and Spirit. Mary conceives not merely when she hears the angel's word but more precisely when she says "yes" and is "overshadowed." Perhaps the meaning will strike us more profoundly if we say that she was 'irradiated,' or 'electrified' by the Spirit. Communication theology takes this dynamic role of the Spirit into account. Indeed, as Trager noted, as we research which kind of waves reach furthest into human consciousness, we will understand more and more fully that the Spirit is the source of our most profound communications experiences.

Communication activities extend the divine into the human in many ways, including electronic, and through this we experience Word, Spirit and, ultimately, Father. Through communication, Trinity comes alive and we humans come to know the living God.
Communication As A Basic Principle Of Theology

By Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD

[Professor Eilers has served as coordinator of the Social/Pastoral Communication Program at the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila and director of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at St. John’s University in Bangkok.]

Communication Theology does not start with the media or technical means but rather with the center of theology, with God himself. Communication does become the eye through which the whole of theology is seen because the Christian God is a communicating God. Communication becomes a theological principle, a perspective, under which the whole of theology is seen.

Avery Dulles (1969) points to this when he says that “theology is at every point concerned with the realities of communication” confirming that Karl Rahner “brings out the communications dimension” of theology. This is true especially with what he calls “symbolic communication.” In fact, Dulles shows the consequences of this in a chapter on “Theology and Symbolic Communication” with special sections on Fundamental and Practical, but also Systematic Theology. According to him this is also reflected in a special way in fields like Christology, Creation, Grace, Sacraments, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. Juergen Werbick (1997,214 f.) points to this in the section on Communication in the 11th volume, dictionary for Theology and Church (“Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche”) saying that communication is already for some 30 years a leading perspective for fundamental theology where revelation, faith, tradition and ecclesiastical practice are seen as grounded on communicative realities: “God reveals himself in a communicative way i.e. He shares Himself to humans in a relationship which is based on a dialogic exchange of word and response (“Wort und Antwort”), partnership (“Covenant”), which enables a new communicative culture.”

Here, Christian faith and practice is a response to God’s communicating love as revealed by Jesus Christ. Communication thus becomes a theological principle under which the whole of theology is considered and studied. The main elements of such a Communication Theology are Trinity, Revelation, Incarnation and, finally, the Church.

Trinity

At the beginning of Communication Theology stands a Trinitarian God who, within Himself, is Communication. Jesus Christ revealed to us a communicating Trinitarian God. There is an ongoing communication between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit as the Latin-American Bishops said in their statement of the Puebla Assembly (1976): “Christ reveals to us that divine life is Trinitarian communion. Father, Son and Spirit live in the supreme mystery of oneness in
perfect, loving intercommunion. It is the source of all love and all communion that gives dignity and grandeur to human existence.” Carlo Martini in his pastoral plan on Communication for the archdiocese of Milan, *Ephata, Apriti*, refers to the different scriptural sources for this and concludes: “From the Gospel words transpires that sense of profound communion and exchange which live in the mystery of God and which is at the root of all our human communication. In the Trinitarian communion, the dialogue between the persons is ongoing. We can say that in the Trinity the three Divine persons are the more persons as they form a unified communion, and the more communion as they are persons. This way every one of us realizes the same, the more he lives the appropriate identity in dialogue and as gift with and through others.”

Bernhard Härting (1979, 46) is also quoted by Dulles in summarizing this mystery in the following way:

Communication is constitutive in the mystery of God. Each of the three Divine Persons possesses 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.

As human beings, we can communicate because we are created in the image and likeness of such a communicating Trinitarian God!

This communication perspective is also reflected today in Asia; Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999) writes that “Communion and Dialogue are two essential aspects of the Church’s mission, which have their infinitely transcendent exemplar in the mystery of the Trinity, from whom all mission comes, and to whom it must be re-directed.” (No.31)

This understanding leads to the next dimension of Communication Theology.

**Revelation**

Gisbert Greshake, in one of his books on Trinity (1999, 21f.), begins with the Trinitarian communication dimension for revelation which is not only notional but the experience of God’s personal self-revelation to his creatures. He writes:

To the Christian understanding of revelation belongs a threefold consideration: 1. It is the infinite God the Father who reveals himself without limits to humans in
order to unite himself with them in the closest community of love. 2. This revelation happens in the Word –in the broad sense – in a fully human way so that we are all able to understand. At the high point of this God’s revelation, the Word appears in Jesus Christ – God’s Son becoming man in whom God expresses and gives himself totally and without reservation. 3. The acceptance and understanding of God’s word happens within man in a divine way which means the personal, subjective acceptance of God’s word happens in the power of God acting in the Holy Spirit. Only if all these three elements come together can one realize without contradiction that God does not reveal something about him but rather that he communicates himself literally in infinite love and shelters the human beings into his divine life. Revelation understood as radical self-communication therefore pre-supposes a Trinitarian understanding of God.”

The Vatican II Constitution on Revelation *Dei Verbum* states: “By Divine Revelation God wished to manifest and communicate both himself and the eternal decrees of his will for the salvation of mankind. He wished, in other words, to share with us divine benefits which entirely surpass the powers of human mind to understand.” (No.6)

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975, No. 42) speaks of the word as “the bearer of the power of God.” Thus, Christian Communication in its revelational aspect becomes a saving power. God’s revelation is not just a passing on of ‘information’ in its narrow sense, but it is indeed a dialogic process with concrete effects in life, manifested in the sacraments. The dialogic process of Revelation builds on the general means of, and for, human communication. God’s revelation and communication takes place through all the human senses as St. John expresses in his first letter (1 Jo. 1-3): “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life … we proclaim also to you…” In his personal experience of conversion St. Augustine shares how ‘revelation’ affected all his senses: “You called on me, you cried aloud to me, you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me, you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and I gasp for your sweet odor. I tasted you and I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me and I am inflamed with love of your peace.” (X, 27) Both examples show how God’s revelation builds on human nature and experience.

The Mission document of Vatican II *Ad Gentes* sees Mission as the essence of the Church. In a similar way, *Communication Theology sees communication at the center and as the essence of the Church*. The Church exists to communicate. After all, Mission is also communicating. Further, the Church is a community, and no community can exist without communication. A theology of Communion presupposes a Communication Theology. Such communication is at the essence of the relation with God (vertical) but also presupposes communication on the horizontal
level. The emergence of modern technology for communication from Gutenberg to Internet is a special gift to intensify, deepen, but also extend, this communication. “The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect” (Evangelii Nuntiandi 1975, 45). The emergence of a “New Culture” (Redemptoris Missio 1990, 37c) which is determined by modern communications therefore is a special challenge but also an opportunity for the Church today. This goes far beyond any instrumentalization.

A Communication Theology-based Ecclesiology is needed which includes also the new and emerging means of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The Second Vatican Council describes the communication obligation of the Church in the following words: “The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of Faith, Hope and Charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all people… For this reason, the Church is compared, not without significance, to the mystery of the incarnate Word.” (Lumen Gentium, 8) The Church as the body of Christ has to “proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God” (Lc 4, 43) and she says with St. Paul: “Not that I boast of preaching the Gospel since it is a duty that has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it.” (1 Cor. 9, 16)

Along these lines, the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975) states that “Evangelizing – Communicating – is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the mass which is the memorial of his death and glorious resurrection” (No.14). Pope Paul VI reminds us, in the same document, that the Church acquires only its “full meaning when she becomes witness, when she evokes admiration and conversion and when it becomes the preaching and proclamation of the Good News” (No.15). Evangelii Nuntiandi sees as instruments of evangelization and communication not only the mass media but also other means, starting with the witness of life, followed by a living, preaching, liturgy, catechesis, personal contact, sacraments, and popular piety. (Nos.40-48). Avery Dulles has analyzed the different documents of Vatican II under the perspective of Communication and the different Church models reflected in them. He comes up with models for a communicating Church.
Communication As A Theological And Pastoral Challenge

By Matthias Scharer

In the Christian sense, as K. Rahner has repeatedly emphasized, theology as “God-speaking” is speaking of people. It speaks of human communication in the face of God who communicates himself in many ways, ultimately in Jesus Christ. We can also say: the subject of theology is the act of communication based on belief in the one and triune God, who is relationship in himself and who communicates. This still applies even if the Christian perspective of hope may only be implicit in human communication or if the Christian act of faith only inadequately reveals its immanent form of communication.

The question of how Christian theologians get their “communicative” knowledge, i.e. their theology, is inextricably linked with the object of their knowledge: the incarnate God in Jesus Christ, who reveals himself to people, who is inherent in them and who allows them to communicate comprehensively enabled.

The decisive basis of a communicative theology is revelation as the self-communicating “communication” of God with human beings and as the human spirit's gift for comprehensive communication. In God-human communication, not just any partial knowledge about the central meaning of life and the world, about its history and its future is passed on; the God-human communication process reveals "truth in relationship": the search for “truth in relationship” characterizes theological questions as a communicative event in which the respective contexts in which people live and experience are explored for those traces of the Spirit of God that give an inkling of God's absolute devotion make people transparent.

Form Of Communication, Means Of Communication, And Communication Content

In a communication society that is geared towards the indiscriminate and limitless conveyance of information, a clear theological option is needed more than ever for the inextricable intertwining of the form of communication, means of communication, and communication content. Because it changes the respective belief content considerably whether it "comes across" in interpersonal encounters, i.e. developed in "communicative actions", is offered as a means of identification via concrete people with whom I am in a living relationship - with the required freedom, the identification to refuse - or whether a piece of faith information reaches me via a technical medium. In this regard, the question is the trust the churches have always, either more in the clarity of conceptual communication or in the diversity of interpersonal encounters and life testimony based on faith. It is easier to check concepts for their truth than human encounters.
Whether the correct content of faith or the truth of faith that is revealed in the relationship is emphasized, it must always be certain that no communication arrangement can or may guarantee the development of the Christian faith. Fundamental theological limits in the communication of faith are exceeded wherever communicative action is taken or the appearance is given that a certain content, a special method or a promising medium can guarantee the development of faith; rather, it can only ever be a question of the somewhat more correct or less correct conditions for the possibility of faith communication; the consent to faith must be left to the free responsibility of individuals and the gift of God.

Theology As Critical Reflection And Understanding

It is not for nothing that the churches, and, rightly, also the state, afford a theology. In an open society, theologians have the task of making their critical thinking and action potential, which they have gained in the discourse of Judeo-Christian and church tradition with today's social challenges, available to everyone as a decision-making aid in specific communication issues. To put it in a somewhat simplified way, it is about the difference between a commercial enterprise, which has highly qualified personnel for strategic planning and decisions in its management, and the church.

Participating and Cooperating Theologians

At the same time, such a critical discourse between theology, and church, and social communication practice, is in danger of becoming a superstructure or even an “ought to be” made by experts who know everything better, against which practitioners rightly defend themselves. Philosophical theological theses that are decoupled from communication with practitioners, deduced at the “green table” and conveyed from above, can still be correct, but they will not change practice. Only appropriate communication processes, excluding any superiority or subordination of professional theologians and practitioners, will change practice in the long term. These are communication processes in which everyone's competence is required and in which external expert knowledge is not fed in.

It is obvious such a claim must become a challenge for theological teaching. I encountered the most credible testimony of a participatory theologian in G. Gutierrez. A thousand kilometers north of Lima, in a comunidad of the poor on the outskirts of Chiclayo, in which I lived for several weeks, almost every young person knew him from a personal encounter.

Whether the mutual and mutually-critical communication between explicit theological views and pastoral care is successful, or whether, on the contrary, it is derived from theology or practiced in a theology-forgotten manner, is not just an external communication problem. Not least as a result of our humanities studies, which are still largely based on deduction, some people have
internalized the structures of a theology from above in such a way that they are unable to develop a theological judgment appropriate to the communicative challenges in pastoral care. For example, a pastor who has been in practice for 15 years and who is very much responsible for his wife in everyday life, told me that to this day she hardly dares to make an independent theological statement.

**Theological (Self-) Awareness From Communicative Theology**

The university course "Communicative Theology" at the Theological Faculty, Innsbruck, Austria, presents itself in a process-oriented way of working described challenges. This is carried out in the second round from SS 2003 in five semesters in blocked course weeks. It is aimed at pastors who have completed their theology studies a long time ago. The biographically-shaped experiences of faith and one's own theological history, the ecclesiologically-significant processes in a long-term group, the deep experiences of humanity and faith that are written in the biblical texts and are based on the theological categories – all are kept in a “dynamic balance”; their contextual “grounding” is sought in all phases. With the communicative approach of topic-centered interaction (RC Cohn), the theological hermeneutics of everyday communication processes in pastoral care is not dealt with theoretically, but practiced jointly in a way that decisively promotes personal growth, leadership, communication and conflict skills, combined with theological self-confidence. Information on the course can be found at: [http://theol.uibk.ac.a](http://theol.uibk.ac.a)

**Literature**


From Matthias Scharer:

INNOVATION: Develop theological and didactic attention.
Pastoral as an educational event?
Supervision between (strategic) power of interpretation and communicative "powerlessness"
The "hallowed" fragment
Education as an intercultural diakonia
Communicate or discover the Holy Spirit?
"Do not leave until you are sent?" Is there a problem of pathological limitation of missionary entitlement in the Church today?
"The spirit blows where it wants"
Embodiment Of The Word: A Pastoral Approach To Scripture In A Digital Age

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The purpose of this paper is to outline a new paradigm for the pastoral ministry of the proclamation of the Word in, and for, post-literate, digital culture. The need for this new paradigm grows out of the recognition that the present practices of proclamation of the Word were developed in, and for, the literate cultures of the past 2000 years and are increasingly boring for a digital generation. The degree of this problem is reflected in many evangelical Protestant liturgies that are designed to reach out to the young people of digital culture such as the “nones.” Last year for the first time in American history, those who identified their religious affiliation as “none” was the largest group. In many of the worship experiences designed to reach out to the “nones,” the reading of Scripture has been eliminated from the liturgy. In many of those liturgies, there are no Scripture readings, only contemporary music with a rock band and a sermon that may include some paraphrases of Scripture.

Why? Because Scripture readings have become a dead time and a turn-off for digitally sophisticated folk. To put it bluntly, the proclamation of the Word is boring for many people accustomed to highly engaging media experience. I have observed this flat line of meaning in Christian congregations across the full range of traditions, Eastern and Western. It has become a ritual tradition that is often largely meaningless for people who regularly hear highly engaging speech and storytelling in “the media.” How has it happened that the most compelling media experience of the Word for centuries has become boring in the 21st century?

Let us begin with a description of the theory, history, and practices of the proclamation of the Word in the communication cultures in and for which the current tradition developed. The present conception of the Scriptures in western Christianity has been shaped in and for the communication culture of literacy and, specifically, the Enlightenment. In this culture, the Bible has been conceived as a series of texts that were read by readers alone and in silence. This concept of the Bible has led to a disembodied, objective presentation of the Word shaped by the levels of the mastery of literacy. Thus, in Roman Catholic liturgies, the Old Testament and epistle readings can be done by a literate lay person, but the Gospel is customarily read by a deacon or priest and then interpreted by a theologically literate priest. This paradigm determines the proclamation and homiletical interpretation of the Word in the liturgy, the preparation of pastors in seminary, and the role of Scripture in the often-hierarchical relationship between pastors and laity.
Our degrees are symbols of the levels of mastery of literacy in which the most advanced is the culture of the silent reading and writing of texts. The meaning of the biblical texts has been defined by Hans Frei in his book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, as meaning, as reference. In the hermeneutics of meaning as reference, the texts of the Bible are studied as a reference source in which a trained reader can identify two kinds of referential information. The first is the empirical meaning of the texts as a source of ostensive information about the actual historical events that are described in the texts. A wide range of ostensive meaning has been identified ranging between the spectrum of conservative and liberal biblical interpretation. On one end of the spectrum, the Bible is an inerrant, non-contradictory and literal source of the exact details of historical events such as the creation of the world, the miracles, the resurrection, and the end of the world.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Bible is a predominantly legendary source of some historical data mixed with a complex of myth, later theology, and retrospective editing of the tradition. The search to define ostensive meaning has led to divisions between the conservative and liberal communities and movements such as, for example, the quest of the historical Jesus, the creationist museum, and the controversies around the original and perpetual virginity of Mary. The second type of meaning as reference is to study the texts as a source of ideal meaning, that is, of the ideas that are reflected in the texts. The ideal reference of the texts is their theological meaning. The ideal meanings range from a systematic theology, a single, non-contradictory system of theological doctrine in the texts to a complex set of theologies that are implicit in the various traditions of the biblical world.

This hermeneutical system is the source of the current practices of the proclamation of the Word in western Christianity, Catholic and Protestant. The reader stands behind a lectern, often only a head appearing above the book. Often the congregation looks at a missal, a bulletin insert, a pew Bible, or sometimes at a screen where the text is projected. In more formal liturgies, the congregation stands for the reading of the Gospel. The book, often a big book, is in front of the reader. To do the reading well, the reader must keep the eyes fixed on the text with a slight look up on occasion if the text is learned well enough. The tone is within a relatively narrow range, sometimes a virtual monotone, and without emotion. The homilist has a much broader freedom of expression and movement. The tone can vary widely; the congregation can be addressed directly. It is even possible to invite laughter. The homilist is also free to move, sometimes even out of the pulpit and directly in front of the congregation. But the proclamation of the Word operates within a relatively strict set of limits. In as far as possible, the Word is rendered as a documentary source of referential information that can then be interpreted and made meaningful by the preacher.

How did we arrive at this point in the history of the proclamation of the Word? A brief history: the proclamation of the Word in literate culture had its origins in the oral traditions of pre-literate
culture, the culture of bards and storytellers. In that culture, traditions were often, even generally, chanted. The stories were told from memory and were passed down from generation to generation by oral transmission.

The reading of manuscripts became the dominant practice in correlation with the evolution of the synagogue in which the liturgy was essentially a scripture reading, often with multiple readers, and prayers. Internalization of the Scriptures continued, in part due the demands of early manuscripts that were essentially a list of letters without punctuation or word divisions. In the early centuries of the Church, in the manuscript culture of the ancient world, the performances of the Word developed into major media events. The proclamation of the Word was often a series of as many as six long readings that would take 30-40 minutes.

In the Apostolic Constitutions of the 6th century, there is a fascinating insight into the cultural power of these performance events. It is stated there that persons are to be prohibited from leaving the service prior to the homily and the Eucharist. This prohibition was issued because people were coming to the churches to hear the proclamation of the Word and, once they had heard the readings, they were not interested in staying for the rest of the service.

The chanting of the Scriptures was normal practice for centuries in both the Eastern and Western churches and is still widely practiced in the Eastern churches including the Syrian Malabar rites. The importance of the chant in rabbinic Judaism and in the various Orthodox churches is evident in the training and ordination of cantors in Judaism and extensive programs in Byzantine chant/music at the Greek Orthodox seminary Holy Cross and at the Russian Orthodox St. Vladimir’s seminary.

The invention of the printing press and the much more widespread distribution of the Bible in the West had a significant effect on the proclamation of the Word and the dominant style of biblical performance gradually changed in western Christianity. Thus, for example, the King James Bible was composed in the early 17th century for public reading in an elevated tone but in a speaking tone rather than a chant. While the chanting of the Bible continued in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches for centuries even into the 20th century, reading in a more informal speaking tone became the dominant practice. In correlation with the hermeneutical revolution of the Enlightenment and meaning as reference, the tonal range of the proclamation of the Word was gradually narrowed and became more of a monotone.

The editing of the manuscripts into printed documents included word divisions, a full range of punctuation, and paragraphing. This made it possible for readers to read the Scriptures aloud with minimal to no preparation. When seen in the context of the history of communication culture, the proclamation of the Word has been immensely successful in the literate cultures of
human civilization. The books of the Bible have been and are the most extensively performed literature in history.

The Bible has been the perennial best seller and has been more widely distributed and read than any other book. The exegetical and interpretive literature of biblical scholarship and commentary far exceeds any other literary tradition. And the proclamation of the Word in liturgy has been the most powerful and pervasive performance tradition in literate culture. But we now live in the first period of human history in which a communication system other than literacy has become the dominant system of communication and cultural formation. And the systems the Church has developed for the communication and interpretation of the Word are declining in their cultural impact. This, then, is a brief history of the proclamation of the Word and the evolution of the technologies of literacy and the stages of literate culture. It is also the historical context for the pastoral ministry of the proclamation of the Word in digital culture.

There is a stark contrast between the style of the proclamation of the Word in Christian liturgy and the character of digital culture. This is a random list of some of the characteristics of digital culture: highly engaging, emotionally compelling, striking and rapidly changing images, physical presence, and a wide range of tonalities. The proclamation of the Word now is characterized by no emotion, static images, no movement, minimal engagement with the audience, and a very narrow range of tonalities. Therefore, we have a problem. The normative tradition is profoundly incongruent with the culture of the digital world.

A New Paradigm of the Scriptures

A new paradigm of the Scriptures has emerged from the recognition of the original character of biblical literature in the context of the media culture of the Hellenistic/Greco-Roman world. The study of the Bible in ancient and modern media has revealed that biblical scholarship has read the media world of the 17th to the 20th centuries back into the ancient world. We have operated with the unexamined presupposition that the Bible was originally a series of texts read by readers. The so-called “reader” is a ubiquitous description of the receivers of biblical literature in biblical monographs and commentaries. Several metaphors have been operative: 1) a group of editors editing texts of the Pentateuch or the synoptic Gospels with two or three manuscripts spread out on big tables, 2) a network of bookstores selling a wide range of manuscripts for reading by literate persons, 3) readers sitting and reading manuscripts in silence.

The study of the media world of antiquity has made it clear that these assumptions are an anachronistic reading back into the ancient world of a much later communication culture. Current estimates are that only 3-5% of persons in rural areas to 10%-15% of persons in urban were literate. Manuscript production involved laborious copying by hand and was on a small scale. Manuscripts were available in a small network of stores but were expensive. Silent reading
was rare; public and private reading was reading aloud. The great majority of persons were only able to experience biblical literature by hearing the manuscripts read aloud to audiences of illiterates.

Memory was a central dimension of education and manuscripts were often recited from memory. In the ancient world, the Bible was a series of compositions of sound that were performed for audiences. The predominant sensorium, to use Walter Ong’s term, of ancient audiences was the sensory system of hearing with the ears rather than reading with the sensory system of the eyes. These ancient performances were a continuation of the styles of performance in oral culture: highly emotional, wide range of tonalities, constant engagement of the audience, physically demonstrative and expressive.

Thus, biblical scholarship has been engaged in a massive media anachronism in which the media culture of the Enlightenment has been read back into the ancient world. This is also the case with what has become standard practice in the proclamation of the Word. We have assumed that the disembodied, emotionally detached, and static reading with no engagement of memory or audience interaction reflects the original character of the Word.

A brief engagement with a particular story may help to show the difference it makes. I have just published (Summer, 2015) a (450 pages) detailed commentary on Mark’s passion and resurrection narrative as a story told to audiences that were predominantly Israelite but included the enemy Gentiles in the immediate aftermath of the Jewish-Roman war. The book’s title is The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark’s Passion-Resurrection Narrative. The discovery of the resurrection by three women is the ending of the Gospel in the best ancient manuscripts. Let me read it for you in the current mode.

When experienced as a text read by readers, the ending is a puzzle and many readers over the centuries have concluded that it either was not or should not be the ending. Textual copyists added two endings that are often included in contemporary texts as you can see here. Until the study of the stories, as stories, most scholars concluded that this could not have been the original ending. Various explanations for the lost ending have been proposed. The most widely accepted is that the original manuscript was mutilated, and the last page was lost. Others have been that the original copyist either fell asleep or forgot or that the original appearance narrative was left out of an early manuscript that became the most authoritative manuscript. When studied as a story told to audiences, several elements of the story are notable. The women are grieving, and that tone is present from the beginning. The stone rolled back is a major surprise and is loud. The discovery of the young man in “the tomb” is an even bigger surprise, variously alarming/terrifying. The announcement of the resurrection is short: one word in Greek. The whole announcement and specifically the command to “Go, tell” is addressed to the audience.
The women’s response is fearful flight and is surprising since it is a violation of the command but completely understandable in the light of their feelings.

The cola of the story gets shorter and shorter, which is a typical Markan way of building a climax. The impact of the story invites the audience to reflect on their response: to tell or to remain silent and say nothing are the implicit options. I will tell you the story so you can experience the difference. (Performance of the story). The way in which Mark’s story is proclaimed makes a difference in the way in which it is perceived. And it literally doesn’t make sense when read in the traditional manner.

What is the difference? What has happened in the course of the history of the proclamation of the Word? The proposal here is that the process of the media history of the Word in literate culture has led to the disembodiment of the Word.

There are several dimensions of bodily expression: emotion, vocal range in volume and tone, movement, clothing, furniture, the text, and relationship to the audience. The emotional range of the proclamation has been steadily reduced to virtually none. The reader is encouraged to regard any emotional expression as alien to the Word. The vocal range has been narrowed until it is often a straight-line monotone. I associate the sound with computer speech or a flat-line heart or brain monitor. There is no movement or gesture, no physical move of feet, hands, or often even the head. Covering the reader’s body with a robe or hiding the body behind a lectern emphasizes this disembodiment.

Sometimes the only part of the body that is visible is a head peeking out from behind the lectern. The lectern itself creates emotional distance. The presence of the text also creates distance. And perhaps most important, the implicit dialogue between the reader and the audience is virtually eliminated. The audience is not addressed by the reader and is not invited to engage with the Word directly. As a result of all these factors, there is a multifaceted disembodiment of the presence of the Word in the performance. The experience of the Word is reduced to the theological ideas that may be communicated in the proclamation. And when all of this is experienced in the context of digital culture, the degree of psychological and physical distance is increased.

The Pastoral Possibilities of the Embodiment of the Word

This re-conception of the Scriptures as interactive, embodied communication between God and human beings opens a new range of pastoral possibilities for the proclamation of the Word. These new possibilities emerge from the close connection between the word in oral culture and the word what Walter Ong called the “secondary orality” of post-literate, digital culture. At the center of the proclamation of the Word in the ancient world and now is the internalization of the
Word. Internalization involves memory but it is more than memory. The phrase, “by heart,” is indicative of this difference. The Word is invited to dwell in all the interior spaces of a person. As expressed in the Deuteronomist’s injunction of the love of God, internalization of the Word is the love of God with all of the heart, the soul, the mind, and the strength, that is, the physical muscles and bones of the body.

It is diametrically different than the rote recital of the surfaces of a printed document. Memory is a central dimension of internalization. But memorization is often associated with mindless rote repetition of a set of printed words. That kind of memorization is about surfaces and the superficial mastery of sounds. Internalization is deep knowledge grounded in vivid experience and intellectual engagement. The role of the documentary record of the original sounds of the Word is to open a door into an experience of God. The mastery of musical manuscripts is a helpful analogy. A pianist who is learning, say, Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto begins with learning the notes but from the beginning this learning involves muscle memory, visual connections, deep listening, and the discovery of emotional dynamics. If anything, the embodiment of the Word is more comprehensive in its engagement of the various dimensions of a person. The embodiment of the Word is thus a spiritual discipline, a spiritual exercise, and a spiritual adventure of dynamic relationship with God.

This foundation of embodied internalization of the Word lays the ground for the building of new possibilities for the proclamation of the Word in, and for, digital culture. First, liturgical proclamation of the Word as performance creates a dynamic equivalent experience of the impact of the original composition for contemporary congregations. Rather than the meaning of the biblical composition being limited to the theological ideas implicit in the text, embodied proclamation of the Word makes present a more comprehensive range of the dynamics of the original experience.

This approach also introduces a partnership model of shared preparation between lay lectors and pastors in which the common experience of the impact and emotion of the Scripture can generate energy for the homily and the Eucharist. This partnership involves mutual engagement with the Scriptures that leads to more energetic and grounded liturgy.

The experience of Scripture as embodied performance also transforms the relationship between the congregation and the Word. Rather than detached reflection on the printed text, sometimes made available in a missal, pew bible, or on a screen, the congregation is enabled to enter into a dialogical engagement with the Word as a wholistic experience.

The proclamation of the Word as internalized experience opens the possibility of moving out from behind the lectern and a printed text into an open space without distancing barriers. Either with or without a text between the lector/priest and the congregation, the presence of the body
introduces the vital role of internalization of the Word in the life of the congregation. Finally, the proclamation of the Word as vital experience invites the full utilization of digital images and music as an integral dimension of the liturgy.

To conclude, Walter Ong titled his Yale lectures on communication and theology “the presence of the Word.” This title was a description of the dynamic relationship between the prevalent communication system, the psychological dynamic of the communicator in each communication culture, and the character of the Word. Ong’s enduring contribution is the identification of the dynamic and changing relationship between the word and communication culture. In each new communication culture, the word becomes present in a different way. Ong only dealt peripherally with the presence of the Word in digital culture. The purpose of this paper has been to identify a constructive approach to the proclamation of the Word in the context of the most radical change in communication culture since the emergence of literate culture in the Hellenistic world of the 5th -1st centuries before Jesus’ life. The thesis here is that the dynamic presence of the Word in digital culture depends on an equally radical change in the proclamation of the Word in the liturgical practice of the Church.

The suggestion is that we move from the disembodiment of the Word to the embodiment of the Word in a fully present proclamation.
Communication Education For Seminarians And Theologians: Some Considerations

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If the purpose of a seminary is to educate people for ministry one might first examine this purpose a little bit deeper. The word “educare” has, as its roots, the Latin word “ducere’ which means “to lead”, to give direction. “E-ducare” might therefore be interpreted to “lead out”, to give direction. It would mean to lead out of ignorance to knowledge and understanding. Education thus might be interpreted as to prepare people for life and to equip them with the knowledge and means necessary for life.

It means, for the Seminary, to enable the students to know where to go and what to do in their future work as ministers to the Word of God. Education includes from elementary years reading and writing and other communication skills as essential for understanding and mastering life. When we talk about communication education in the Seminary and theological schools it is good to keep these basics in mind. Usually when we talk about “Communication Education” in the Seminary we think immediately of mass media or the modern means of communication which includes especially technical tools.

Most media courses, or even those more general on communication, aim at equipping the seminarian in the use and technique of the modern means of communication for his/her ministry. This, however, should not be the first purpose in the seminary. It should have been done already at the college level before entering the seminary for graduate studies. Today it should be part of any educational program to enable every student to critically judge and use the modern means of communication. This is part of the Communication/media education which in turn should be part of any school curriculum. It includes having a general knowledge about the ways and means modern media operate like e.g. the essential criteria to judge the quality of a news item, a TV program, or a film. It is to enable people to become informed and responsible recipients. Communication Education in the seminary should be already on a more advanced level and should be able to build on the general media education in college and earlier. Programs in the seminary should slowly lead the seminarian to the proper and active use of communication for ministry because s/he is part of the modern communication world. This, however, includes not only modern means and technology. Proper communication preparation for ministry starts much earlier and is based on the essentials of human communication.
Essential Need For Human Communication

To communicate is essential to Christian ministry. If we look into the early Church as reflected in the *Acts of the Apostles*, we find that at that early stage everybody was a communicator of her/his faith. “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” it says in Acts 8,4 referring to the persecution in Jerusalem (cf. also Acts 11,19-21!). Even when exiled, persecuted, and driven away they communicated and shared their faith and conviction to people around them. In fact, they saw it as a special calling and grace to become this way missionaries of the early faith community. It was the Holy Spirit who guided and ‘inspired’ them beyond any technical means. “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip…” (8, 26); “Encouraged by the Holy Spirit” the church grew in Judea, Galilee and Samaria (9, 31); “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul…” (13, 2) “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in the province of Asia…” (16, 6) This should not be different in the communication of the Church today! Therefore, a proper communication education must start on this personal and spiritual level. It must start with the Holy Spirit!

Here we might also look in a special way into the ways and means of Jesus’ communication. How did the master himself communicate? He is not the “perfect Communicator” because he was successful in the modern sense of the word. He did not convert the Pharisees and the Scribes, but he communicated the love and care of the Father and His Kingdom. He became the perfect communicator because he lived and practiced the basics of any human and Christian communication! He communicated in word and deed. The circumstances of his life, his birth in the manger, his death on the cross are a communication of God’s love and his humility to become one of us. It is “giving of self in love” which is the essence of Jesus’ communication and of any Christian communication as one of the church documents described it (*Communio et Progressio*, 1971, no. 11).

Jesus’ healing, and dealing with people, reflect the basics of Christian communication. The healing of the mother in Law of Peter (Mk 1, 31) is just one example: He goes to her, holds her by the hand, and lifts her up i.e. heals her. These are the basics of any human and Christian communication which should be developed from the early stages in the seminary as an essential habit of a minister:

- Go to a person
- Place yourself into her/his situation (‘shoes’), and
- Lift her/him up, help and heal in the power of God/Christ.

If all our ministries and even our own lives and dealings with each other would be based on these three steps our own communities and the world probably would be different! This shows also
that seminary education in communication is not first and foremost a technical task but rather a concern for a deep spirituality and faith.

It might be good at this stage also to remind ourselves there is a great difference between training and formation which comes into play here. Training is concerned about skills whereas formation leads to an inner disposition. What we need first is a proper formation which is not only reflected in a curriculum but also in the spiritual formation and the personal relationship and experience of the Lord. It really means to put on the body and soul of Christ in relating with others, in our own “giving of self in love” (C+P 11). It is not measured primarily in the ‘Doing’ but rather in the ‘Being.’

Communication education in the seminary must start on the level of formation and develop from there. Placed into an overview one might see the different levels and concerns in the following way:

- Education > Knowledge
- Training > Skills: ‘Doing’
- Formation > inner disposition: ‘Being’

Proper communication education starts on the level of formation which is not only taught in words and prescriptions but on the level of deep spirituality and faith and example. This must also be considered as a special concern in Asia because our Asian cultures are based, and have their essential identity from, their spirituality.

**Broader Approach to Communication**

These basic considerations need a further dimension to show that communication education is not only about Mass Media but needs a much broader approach which includes especially the cultural dimension. The Second Vatican Council was the first Catholic Church assembly of that level which issued a document on “Social Communication,” *Inter Mirifica*.

The expression *Social Communication* was proposed by the preparatory commission for the document in saying that expressions like Mass Media, Media of Diffusion, Audio-visual means, and similar words would not be sufficient to express what the Church is concerned about. This proposal was accepted and became the standard expression in the Catholic Church, but it was later adapted by secular communication institutions especially in Latin America.

Social Communication refers, beyond mass media, to all means and ways of communication in and of human society. It includes communication through traditional means like storytelling, dance, theater, music etc. as well as the modern means. It covers the whole range of human
communication in society and thus creates a special challenge for the communication education in seminaries.

Future Christian ministers must be open and be trained in the proper application of communication means and methods which are part of our cultures. Many times, especially in rural areas, this communication is still more effective than modern technical means because it includes the direct personal involvement of the communicating parties. Such an awareness and support of traditional communication can also help to mitigate, or even integrate, possible negative effects of globalization especially on young people.

Christian faith needs to be contextualized and enculturated which is not done necessarily with the modern means. This broader approach to communication, however, which gives equal ‘right’ to the basics of human communication and the traditional means of communication leads towards that.

**Based on Communication Theology**

Communication education in the seminary should further not only be considered as *one* of the many subjects taught in a theological school. There is a deeper theological reason, why the communication dimension should be at the center of *all* teaching in Theology. This is the concern of the emerging field of *Communication Theology* which should be underlying any communication education in the seminary.

In the past we have very often tried to develop a “Theology of Communication” which somehow attempted to “baptize” communication, especially the mass media and bring them into the Church’s fold. It can be expressed in the following graphic:

![Communication Theology Diagram](image)

There is also another perspective and consideration aiming for a “Communicative Theology.” It is concerned with the ‘communicative expressions’ of Theology. How can Theology express itself in such a way that it can be more easily understood by simple people and non-theologians?
“Communication Theology”, however, takes Communication as a theological principle. The whole of Theology is considered and studied under the perspective of communication. Beginning with the Trinitarian God as communication between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it goes through Revelation to Incarnation as God’s way of communicating and from there to the communication of the Church as the continuation of this communication into every time and place. The basic approach can be shown in the following way:

a. The Trinitarian God communicates in Himself i.e. there is an ongoing communication at the Center of the Holy Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit communicate with each other and we, as human beings, are able to communicate because we are created in “His image and likeness.” Here is the theological reason for our own communication ability.
b. This Trinitarian communicating God, however, also reveals himself in communicating with his creatures. He uses all ways and means of human communication; he communicates verbally and non-verbally, he communicates with signs and actions. On almost every page, the Old (First) Testament documents God’s non-verbal and verbal communication with his people.

c. The high point of this revelation, however, is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. God the Father communicates with his creatures through his son, Jesus Christ. As the letter to the Hebrews affirms: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the 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…” (1, 1-3). Jesus Christ again communicates in words and deeds; he uses signs and symbols which go beyond or support his words. He communicates through the whole way of his life. (cf. Communio et Progressio 11).

d. The Church receives from all this her sending (mandate) to communicate. She is to continue God’s communication in Revelation and Incarnation into the here and now of every time and place. Thus, the Church is the presence of the communicating God between peoples; she is communication, as Avery Dulles wrote in a famous paper for the American Bishops in 1971. Social communication is not just a job for specialists, even Church-specialists, but a dimension for every Christian as member of the Church and is to be reflected in daily life. In the same way, as in the Acts of the Apostles, today every Christian is and must be a communicator in the full sense, thus reflecting the Church.

Communication - Salvation History/ Process

KERYGMA  
KOINONIA  
DIAKONIA

Revelation (OT)  
Incarnation (NT)

Trinitarian Dimension

As a result of all these considerations, it is clear the need for Communication Education in the Seminary is not just served with one additional course on media or something like this in the already overcrowded curriculum.
In the spirit of Communication Theology all theological disciplines should be aware of, and should include, the communication dimension in their teaching and research. All are related to God’s communication as Avery Dulles points out: “theology is at every point concerned with the realities of communication” (The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System, 1992, 22. cf. Eilers 2002, 43).

If the Church is to continue God’s communication from Trinity to Revelation and Incarnation into the ‘here and now’ of people of every time and place, it must be reflected in all of theology and all of her pastoral ministries. This, however, is not only a question of knowledge and transmission of knowledge but, once again, rather a disposition and inner dimension of every theology professor. At the same time it is a unifying element for the whole of theology. The Jesuits pointed in this direction with a document on social communication in their General Congregation 1995 when they wrote:

Communication in the society has usually been considered as a sector of apostolic activity, a field for some specialists who have often felt isolated or on the margin of the apostolic body. The society needs to acknowledge that communication is not a domain restricted to a few Jesuit professionals, but a major apostolic dimension for all our apostolates. Clearly not all Jesuits should engage in media. Nevertheless, every Jesuit, in order to be effective, must be aware of and well versed in the language, symbols, and strengths and weaknesses of the modern communication culture. This is to make the shift, to realize that this communication environment is a milieu in which large numbers of people can be reached and enriched, where literacy, knowledge and solidarity can be fostered.

Indeed, communication is an integral dimension of all apostolates and this must be reflected also in any communication education in the seminary.

**Curriculum for Social Communication**

What would a *Curriculum for Communication* in seminary education look like?

1. First it needs to be stated again, that there is the basic need for communication formation on the human and spiritual level. This is not done with a course alone but through the whole formation program and an open communicative atmosphere in a seminary. The three basic steps of human and Christian communication, to go, to embrace and immerse, and to lift up (cf. Mk 1,31), are not only taught but practiced in daily life. If, especially at the beginning of theological studies, an introductory course could be given to make the students more aware of the basics of this human/Christian communication, it would set the tone for all the following studies and activities in theology. In fact, I have been
teaching such a course for almost 20 years at the Divine Word School of Theology in Tagaytay, Philippines. Every school year the students of the first year of theology have in the first semester an obligatory course “Introduction to Social Communication” where we talk mainly about human communication, the theological dimension of communication and, only in passing, about the basics of media and group communication. (This is reflected in the textbook we use: Communicating in Community, where the first two chapters are more extensively covered, whereas the others are given only in the basics as far as time allows.)

2. We cannot escape the fact that the modern world is a world of communications. Pope John Paul II calls the world of communication “the first areopagus of the modern age which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a ‘global village.’ The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media.” (Encyclical Redemptoris Missio 1990, 37c) This requires from every theology student, more than from others, the ability of critically seeing and using the means of communication in daily life. It is the purpose of Media or Communication Education to bring this basic knowledge and develop a critical mind especially in young people. It should be an obligatory course and training already on the high school and college level. Such education introduces the workings of modern media, their structures, means and methods. It shows e.g. the basic elements of a news item, how the different radio and TV programs are produced, but also how communication companies are structured and try to exercise power in conquering the mind and taste of people for their purposes.

3. After this basic training there is a need for a special course on pastoral communication especially in the later development of theological studies: how to communicate in Ministry and Mission. How do the modern means of communication influence and determine those people we live with and we are to care for? How can we make good use of these means in our ministry to serve the needs of people better and bring them nearer to the Lord? The people we work with are living in a world determined by the media and even we are consciously or unconsciously part of it ourselves. How can we let the Holy Spirit come into such a situation? The same is true for those ministries, who serve people from other cultures. Our communication must adjust, and be determined by, these cultures because it is always the recipient who is the ‘basis’ for our decision-making and our communication approach. Jesus starts with the life and concerns of the people. We must do the same in our time!

4. In addition to these basic courses and approaches for every seminarian there should be also some offers for more specialized courses, especially for students with greater interest
and some communication capabilities of their own. Thus, there could be a film-club as a regular activity where seminarians once or twice a month watch a movie, discuss the content, methods in presenting the story, and a critical evaluation. Cardinal Roger M. Mahony from Los Angeles has written 1992 a “Pastoral letter for Film Makers, Film Viewers: their challenges and opportunities” (cf. Eilers: Church and Social Communication. Basic Documents. Manila 1997) which could be helpful for such an activity. Talented seminarians could also themselves practice radio and television productions or become part of such, either on their own or in existing companies. Journalistic practices can be developed and taught. When I was a seminarian, we had a “Press-group” where we wrote news items and articles for existing newspapers and periodicals; they were printed and published, and we were very proud of it. Many of us saw our names printed for the first time.

Today we have new communication and information technologies. How are we going to ‘use’ them in our ministry and how can they help? What about E-vangelism, cyber-missionaries or similar activities and possibilities?

Other fields like Media or Communication Ethics should not be overlooked. They can be part of Moral Theology, but this would need a broader study in our times.

5. The need for serious research in the field of social communication and theology has also to be mentioned here. When Pope John Paul II talks about the “new areopagus” he also mentions there is now a “new culture.” This 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.” Such a situation calls for deeper research and study which is very often missing in our Christian communication activities. We very often live and work more according to trial and error rather than based on serious study and research. This is not only a call on theological faculties or other specialized bodies. Also, seminary students should be involved in research and looking deeper into issues. They can be encouraged to write respective papers or even do their thesis on a communication-related subject. They can be involved in surveys to discover a certain communication situation. Thus, two years ago, with my students, we did a study on how young people in the areas around the theological school and in some parts of Manila use and see modern media in their lives. Unfortunately, we have very few scientific publications specializing in this field. We must go deeper to explore the ‘market’ but also to see better the different possibilities for God’s Word in our time.

Following an initiative from our Office of Social Communication we – also with the help of WACC – called upon a group of academicians from different Asian countries in 1999 to start at
St. John’s University in Bangkok an “Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication” (ARC). It is supposed to be a clearing house, to collect and disseminate relevant information, and animate people to explore the relationship between Social Communication and Religion. And this is not for Christianity only but for all religions. It is not only Christianity which lives in a new modern communication society.

What are we to do?

There is a certain sequence already in the programs proposed. But this is not done just with adding new courses. More important is to change our own and other peoples mind-set. In the spirit of the Jesuit considerations mentioned above we must see that social communication is not only a specialized field but rather the “air we breathe” and the “water we swim in.” Right from our upbringing we are influenced and to quite an extent determined by the ways and means of communicating in our own cultures but also by the modern means of communication, which today even go beyond the mass media. We cannot live without Internet anymore. What are the pastoral and theological consequences of this fact? This question has to be answered first and foremost by seminary professors but also by every seminarian.

The task before us is great but urgent. There is no time any more to be lost and we should begin here and now to change and slowly adjust our mind-set to the realities of this ‘new culture’ with “new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.” (John Paul II)
Challenges For Evangelization In The Digital Age

By Paul A. Soukup, S.J.

No one would doubt the importance of the new digital technologies for contemporary society and for the Church. These technologies—particularly in their role as communication technologies—such as the Internet, direct broadcast satellites, and cellular telephony—offer the possibility of profoundly changing aspects of human interaction. Through its various offices, among its members, and at congresses, the Church has already begun to reflect upon these technologies, their promises, and their risks. In this essay, I will review some of what we know and some of what we might deduce about the impact of the digital technologies (particularly as they touch upon the religious realm), then reflect more specifically upon evangelization, and finally examine some of the challenges before us as a Church. We must think more about the digital world and try to understand it, both to apply these tools to evangelization, not in an instrumental way, but to evangelize the very world they create.

I. Impact of Digital Technologies

When printed Bibles came from the newly invented printing press of Johannes Gutenberg in the middle of the 15th century, little did anyone dream of the extraordinary consequences that would result from this new communication technology. We would do well, however, to consider what this old new technology tells us about a change in communication patterns, for, of all the communication technologies that have come before, the digital technologies resemble the printing press most in their effects. In her magisterial studies of how the printing press changed early modern Europe, Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979, 1983) demonstrates changes in both personal and social behaviors, as well as deeper changes in the very structures of European societies—including the Church.

Among other things, the printing press increased the speed of communication: by shortening the time it took to produce a book, the printing press allowed more books into circulation at a faster rate than had existed through the work of the scriptoria. This increase in speed led to an increase in the dissemination of information. And that increase, in turn, increased people’s access to information; books in circulation, available from booksellers, not chained to library walls, meant people could read more books. This, in its turn, increased the range of information available to people—they could, more or less, read whatever they wished and not be limited to the few books that happened to be close to them. As she describes the “emergence of print culture,” Eisenstein highlights some of these features:

More abundantly stocked bookshelves obviously increased opportunities to consult and compare different texts. Merely by making more scrambled data
available, by increasing the output of Aristotelian, Alexandrian, and Arabic texts, printers encouraged efforts to unscramble these data. Contradictions became more visible, divergent traditions more difficult to reconcile. … Not only was confidence in old theories weakened, but an enriched reading matter also encouraged the development of new intellectual combinations and permutations. … Increased output directed at relatively stable markets, in short, created conditions that favored new combinations of old ideas at first and then, later on, the creation of entirely new systems of thought.

It should be noted that cross-cultural interchange was experienced first of all by the new occupational groups responsible for the output of printed editions … [A] remarkable amount of innovative work in both scholarly and scientific fields was done outside academic centers . . . (pp. 43-44)

Eisenstein goes on to note the print culture also affected the presentation of information: it standardized the look of books, developed new arrangements of information, and fostered a new rhetoric.

Print culture also promoted new processes of sorting information and classifying it (for example, the index at the end of a book or a catalogue of individual books); print culture promoted new methods of collecting information, from correcting manuscripts and copies to urging collaborative work whereby readers would send data to printers. And print culture opened publishing to previously excluded groups: “humble craftsmen” authored books about how to perform various tasks, described tools, and invited people to their workshops (pp. 75-76).

The Impact of Information

Among other things, all of this increased the impact of information. The reinforcement of seeing identical multiple copies of printed books served a presumption of truth. The availability of the same printed texts in every city amplified their message better than any preacher shouting in the streets. The new print culture also offered people a new understanding of place, both through maps that located them more precisely in the world, but also through woodcuts and drawings of cities. The increased travel of the print era interacted with new ways of publicizing places to reorient people in the world.

This should sound familiar to us. We, too, can say that digital communication technologies (particularly the Internet and direct broadcast satellites) have increased the speed of communication and, in turn, have broadened its dissemination. Thus, they have made more information available to more people than before. That information comes free from library or academic structures and, very often, free from commercial structures as well. Another way of
putting this is that digital information bypasses the control mechanisms created in print culture. This greater access to information opens new vistas for people, even over the opposition of governments, schools, or churches.

Like our early modern forbears, we, too, strive to make sense of the abundance of information available to us and we, too, have the possibility of creating “entirely new systems of thought” out of this mix of digital materials. In ways similar to the way the printing press moved cultural and intellectual interchanges away from the universities, the digital technologies have moved many of our interchanges into corporate, entertainment, or personal venues.

And, again like print culture, the new digital technologies have promoted new processes of sorting information, classifying it, and finding it, as any number of search engines can now bear witness. In fact, English usage has accepted a new verb: “to google” someone or something means to look them up using the Internet search engine Google. The Internet (as opposed to direct broadcast satellites, which are not interactive) also promotes new methods of collecting information, from online surveys to the shared resources of listservs and filesharing. And the Internet opens publishing up to previously excluded groups: anyone with access to the World Wide Web can publish. The Internet and direct broadcast satellites also work indirectly to standardize the look of information. More and more, digital information must conform to certain norms of packaging: on the Internet web pages rather than text files or FTP archives; MP3 files rather than CDs; on direct broadcasting satellites, commercial entertainment programming and sports rather than community access materials.

When we add the third digital technology–the cellular telephone to the mix, we begin to see the same reinforcement of the messages carried by the communication systems as Eisenstein found with the printed book. The ubiquity of such information amplifies it at tremendous speed, whether fact or rumor. Information spreads through web pages, text messages, instant messenger, and satellite.

Affecting Time, Place, and Community

Beyond these things the digital technologies also follow in the footsteps of print culture by affecting individuals’ senses of time, place, and community. We can quickly grasp how access to digital materials leads us to allocate our time differently: with more programming to watch via direct broadcast satellites, people spend more time viewing television, much of it non-locally produced. With more information available online, people spend more time at the computer. That shift of time subtly leads to another shift of time, to the point that some Internet commentators have suggested collapsing all time zones into one global, digital, and decimal Internet Xtime (Lovink, 2002, pp. 148-149). The same shift of time allocation occurred with widespread literacy as people spent more time reading and (perhaps only coincidentally) measuring time. The
Internet shifts us more definitely away from solar time to a coordinated virtual time. Direct broadcast satellites do much the same since programming occurs independently of local times. This also means people do not spend time on other activities. Time spent online replaces time previously spent doing other things; time spent watching television replaces other things also.

The digital technologies, like the television before them, affect people’s sense of place. Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) has already demonstrated this phenomenon regarding television. Briefly, the argument runs this way: by changing what people can see, by giving them access to previously only imagined physical places, the television changed their social place, how they understood themselves in relation to others. By allowing a look “behind the scenes,” the television demystified hierarchies, leaders, and neighbors; and so it changed attitudes and behaviors. By viewing “the mysteries,” the television taught social norms and inculcated social roles and particular ways of acting. Direct broadcast satellites do not merely make more television available; they also connect cultural fantasies, showing the idealized and imagined worlds of one culture to another. It is more than an amusing anecdote to hear that visitors to Los Angeles are surprised that the people in Beverly Hills do not resemble the actors in “Beverly Hills 90210.”

The Internet opens the notion of place even more by making its “places” both virtual and interactive. Thus the local matters even less to people online, a phenomenon explored mostly by novelists (Gibson, 1984; Stephenson, 1992), though sociologists have begun to gather data on it as well (Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2002; Wellman, 2001).

Beyond affecting one’s sense of physical place, the digital technologies affect one’s sense of reality. Sherry Turkle (1995) has argued that a host of communication technologies prepared the way for the digital world’s virtual reality. Television, for example, creates “pseudo-events”–things that occur simply to create television content: press conferences, reality shows, instant celebrity (Boorstin, 1971). Television also creates pseudo-relationships, what Horton and Wohl call para-social relationships -- the illusion of [a] face-to-face relationship with the performer” (1956, p. 215). In these instances, people project a sense of belonging and a sense of meaning onto events and people they do not know.

Community changes, too. Brian Stock (1983) explored the phenomenon of textual communities, focusing his attention on groups that grew up before the rise of printing. Print culture intensified the experience of communities forming not only around groups in physical proximity but also around particular texts and the interpretation of those texts. In this sense, Christianity, and the Catholic Church form textual communities, gathered around the Bible and its interpretation. Print culture led to communities of scholars, reading one another’s books; to communities or nations, revering the same founding documents (constitutions, declarations, etc.); and to communities of scientists, collaborating in data collection and analysis. Print culture led to city groups reading and debating contemporary theological issues, as Edwards (1994) has documented in Strasbourg where Protestant communities formed around the texts of Luther. The Internet, in particular, has
fostered this kind of community growth. Much early writing about the Internet called attention to
groups whose sole contact was through email and computer bulletin boards (Rheingold, 1993). More recent studies have examined how social contact and a sense of community result from Internet contact. Quan-Haas and Wellman (2002) report survey data from North America that shows that “online social contact supplements the frequency of face-to-face and telephone contact.” They also found “frequent email users have a greater sense of online community” (p. 291), though this did not translate into greater involvement in their local civic communities. They conclude Internet activity gives “social capital” (defined as contact with friends, civic engagement, and a sense of belonging to a community) another dimension and disperses it over a wider geographical area.

The digital technologies, like the printed books and magazines before them, offer individuals a greater choice of cultural engagement. Cross-cultural interchange happens readily and easily, though not always in a welcome manner. Many countries and individuals have criticized the flood of Hollywood products and the flow of North American marketing across borders through satellite and Internet channels. Setting aside for the moment the evaluation of this, we can readily admit individuals do have access to cultural elements from across the world.

**Societal Impact**

In addition to these influences on individuals, the digital technologies, like the printing press before them, also have an impact on societies. These influences grow, of course, from the ways they affect individuals. The printing press changed the context for language. It helped to legitimize vernacular languages, propelling them into respectable use. While long used as the mother tongues of speakers throughout early modern Europe, the local languages acquired an orthography and a formal literature through their printed forms. Martin Luther, for example, receives credit for creating a German literature in his translation of the Scriptures. The printed works of William Shakespeare set a similar high standard for English as did the writing of Cervantes in Spain or Montaigne in France. This new perception of language both decreased the role of Latin (more and more restricted to academic circles) and contributed to the growing awareness of nations as people considered themselves German or French or Spanish rather than as members of a larger political empire. Printed works contributed both to a sense of community within nation states (speakers and readers of the same language) and to a sense of community across borders (readers of the same books). In either case, a new understanding of borders and boundaries developed.

The printing press also affected language by enabling new forms of expression. Montaigne, more or less, invented the essay: the intimate reflection on a topic, shifting public thinking from the rhetorical public speech to a personalized address to an anonymous reader. Over the centuries—and it did take centuries--printed stories evolved into the form we today call the novel. Here
narrative changes from epic poems and elaborated accounts to a less oral and more text-centered form of language (a change refined yet again by the telegraph and the journalistic style of language it created).

As individuals read the same books and developed textual communities, social structures developed to support these networks of associates. Best documented in terms of science through the various Royal Academies, these networks provided support structures for people of similar interests and ways of increasing the dissemination of ideas. Individuals found greater social mobility through what John Seeley Brown and Paul Duguid have termed “the social life of documents” (1995, 2000). The documents themselves created concrete manifestations of groups, replacing linkages formerly symbolized in political or ecclesiastical ritual. To apply this to the growth of nation-states, they cite the work of the American political scientist, Benedict Anderson:

Anderson argues that a document culture was a key ingredient in the creation of independent nations in the late eighteenth century. Printed documents, Anderson maintains, were essential to replacing the ideology of sovereigns and subjects by creating the idea of a self-constructed society built around shared ideals and shared practices. Anderson's foremost example is the United States. Here the documents that first come to mind include such seminal works as the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Federalist Papers, and the Constitution. But Anderson suggests that “popular” cultural items, such as journals, novels, pamphlets, lampoons, ballad sheets, and so forth were equally important in creating the cultural sense of common interests necessary for the nation’s formation. (1995)

Documents themselves provide the cultural glue that holds groups together.

The ready availability of printed documents also illustrates a countervailing tendency. Recourse to printed materials made societies more diverse, at least in terms of ideas. Each nation or city now had access to more, and competing, voices. While many governments (including that of the Church) tried to limit those voices through various mechanisms of central control or censorship, philosophers and many Enlightenment thinkers argued that only through the competition of these voices would truth emerge. In the English-speaking world, the classic exponent of this argument is John Milton, in the Areopagitica (1644). Most attempts to limit the availability of books, particularly religious books, failed. In time, governments and churches embraced printing technologies and began to provide their own printed materials.

A more indirect development, but an important one nonetheless, arose with the necessity of providing an infrastructure for printing: print shops, booksellers, book traders, and the whole
commercial and technical apparatus of printing. While much of the early structure built on existing groups (scribes migrated to print shops, merchants began to sell books), soon a separate class of individuals developed cooperative arrangements to foster the world of books. These groups often acted independently of other social and political structures.

**Disruptive Technology**

Finally, the printed book acted as a “disruptive technology.” It ushered in an era of social change and helped to motivate people to participate in such change—partially through the spread of new ideas.

These social changes should also sound quite familiar to us. Here again the digital communication technologies have effects on modern life like those of the printing press in early modern Europe. We too experience their impact on language as the Internet and digital television have accelerated the spread of English as a world language. Only very recently have non-English languages gained a foothold online. We, too, have experienced a growing sense of social groups whose identity is shaped by the social life of documents. Brown and Duguid comment:

> Neither capital nor authorization was needed. From political undergrounds connected only by *samizdat* journals to wind-surfers, DeLorean owners, and beekeepers, people with shared interests use communications technologies (both hi- and lo-tech) to help form themselves into self-created and self-organizing groups. To a significant degree, these are held together by documents circulating among members, keeping each conscious of being a member and aware of what others are up to. … Consequently, as never before, scattered groups of people unknown to one another, rarely living in contiguous areas, and sometimes never seeing another member, have nonetheless been able to form robust social worlds. (1995).

We also have recent experience of the formation of protest groups using the digital technologies (especially the Internet and cellular telephony’s ability to send text messages). From the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas to the anti-globalization protesters in Seattle, to the growing anti-war movements—all depend on the ability of communication technologies to provide a social structure.

Like the press before them, governments have had limited success in barring the use of these technologies. The government of China has made perhaps the greatest efforts but has not managed to keep up with online materials. France and Germany have pressured online retailers and auction houses to enforce local laws against Naziism but have been less successful in curtailing English-language uses.
Digital technologies demand an infrastructure. Originally built on existing networks (telephone and television), they bring together a wide range of technologists to collaborate in making the systems work. Surprisingly, most of the original work occurred independently of government oversight: the creation of electronic protocols, the creation of email systems, the transfer of data, the enlistment of enthusiasts, even the beginning of digital commerce (Mueller, 2002). The digital world has managed a kind of parallel social infrastructure. Finally, these new digital technologies also appear as disruptive technologies. They, too, create a world that increases the expectation of social change.

**Digital Impact on Religion**

How, then, does the digital world affect religion? Again, we can follow the lead of Eisenstein as she examines the impact of the printing press. Then we will look more closely at some contemporary research.

Print culture made copies of the Scriptures widely and easily available to people for the first time in Christian history; moreover, people encountered these printed Scriptures privately, not through communal reading. The Protestant groups, therefore, encouraged literacy and Bible study to enable individual believers to directly encounter God’s word and to interpret it in orthodox ways. This alone seems a significant change in Christian practice. But this was not the only religious change ushered in by print.

Actually, church traditions were already being affected by the advent of printing, well before Martin Luther had come of age. When fixed in a new format and presented in a new way, orthodox views were inevitably transformed. The doctrines of Thomas Aquinas, for example, acquired a new lease on life after appearing in print and becoming the subject of a deliberate revival—even before winning approval at the Council of Trent. … Mysticism, like scholasticism, was also transformed when spiritual exercises moved out of the cloisters. ‘Meditative forms of mental prayer’ became subject to rulebooks issued in uniform editions. Attempts to inspire lay devotion, previously characteristic of a localized movement, such as the Northern ‘devotio moderna,’ became much more widespread. In Southern Europe, friars began to address the lay public through printing as well as preaching . . . (Eisenstein, 1979, pp. 314-315)

Print culture also affected the liturgical reform, as the Catholic Church could now insist on uniformity in worship, through uniform printed editions, which lacked the “local variations” of handwritten manuscripts (p. 313). Print culture, then, enabled individual variations in Christian practice but it also standardized its public expression.
More than uniform and widely available texts, the printing revolution also shifted the locus of theology away from the universities to the “scholar-printer, who was often more erudite than the university theologian” and “less likely to defer to clerical judgment” (p. 320). Religious and biblical scholarship began a shift away from the rule of the Church to the rules of evidence. The scriptural tradition moved from analogical interpretation to linguistic studies and critical editions. The printed Bible and other printed theological or religious texts became the subjects of studies, often not authorities in their own right. As noted above, the greater variety and greater availability of texts led to more people puzzling over them, as data, to make sense of them. The contradictions and uncertainties in the texts (nothing new to scholars such as Abelard or Aquinas) led people to develop new intellectual approaches and understandings.

However, the printing press did not simply remain at the margins of institutional religious use. While it did affect the religious practices of many—especially the Protestant groups—the Catholic Church also embraced printing, though in a different way. As noted already, printed texts encouraged Bible study, standardized liturgical practices, and fostered devotional life. Catholic groups, like the Protestant ones, published printed catechisms, though, unlike the Protestants, targeted the clergy rather than the laity. Here, as in the case of the liturgical texts, the Catholic Church maintained its hierarchical patterns in its use of the printing press (Eisenstein, 1979, p. 350). In this we see the religious use of technology followed the organizational patterns of the various Christian churches.

As noted so many times before, these patterns should seem familiar to us as we see people encountering a full range of religious texts and ideas online as well as envisioned in dramatic or filmic forms. The availability of these religious texts leads to an increase scrutiny of those texts: there are over 1.7 million websites indexed under “Bible study,” for example. At the same time, even more so than in early modern Europe, those texts become available outside any religious context. While printed religious works (Bibles, commentaries, devotional guides, for example) existed, they tended to circulate within religious places; reformers and churches used the texts to foster a wider lay spirituality. On the Internet or on television, religious materials appear without any context apart from the web page or programs themselves. Even though one can find them attached to television ministries, “virtual monasteries,” “virtual retreat centers,” or even “virtual dioceses,” religious materials appear free of external certification or gatekeeping. Viewers and readers make of them what they will. Moreover, web designers can simply assemble some texts and proclaim themselves spiritual guides. The authority of the program, text, or web page becomes completely self-contained.

Ironically, for media committed to local control, rather than promote the local, many religious web pages (as well as satellite delivered religious television) assert only one approach and one interpretation—namely their own. Even though that interpretation may well rest on circumstances
local to the web publisher, the publisher claims for it a universal authority. This may well result from the authority of the printed page; whatever the source, the phenomenon seems fairly universal: we believe what we read.

The same pattern seems to take place with religious thought. Just as print led to a revival of medieval scholastic thinkers, the Internet and religious films now revive older ideas of scriptural or theological interpretation. Some of these revivals restate traditional beliefs, but many others return to “the mysteries.” Often coupled with a “conspiracy theory” rhetoric (“these texts or ideas have been maliciously suppressed by the authorities”)–a rhetoric encouraged by television drama like “The X-files” or by political or investigative programs–this revival takes an uncritical approach to anything regarded as spiritual or religious.

Here, too, we see a new beginning of a shift away from the university, the chancery office, or the church as a locus for theology. A growing popular theology has taken root on the Internet and in biblical films–a theology independent of any church or believing community. Often coupled with apocalyptic stories and end-times rhetoric, this theology interprets contemporary events and offers sometimes fantastic versions of an impending doom. Another strand of this popular theology provides a somewhat self-centered, new age interpretation of these same contemporary events.

Where the churches make use of the new digital media, they tend to act as they did with the printing press. Sponsored church sites, for example, resemble the ecclesiologies most congenial to their congregational sponsors. The Vatican site, for example, eschews interactivity for authoritative documents. It functions as a repository of official statements, reinforcing a hierarchical or institutional model of the Church. Despite statements of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication that emphasize the interactive nature of the Internet (2002, nos. 5-6), relatively little interactivity exists on Catholic Church-sponsored pages (Jans, 2002).

Like printed texts before them, digital materials also act as an impetus for community formation. A good deal of recent research into religion and religious practices has begun to examine how individuals make use of online materials. Campbell (2003), describing an ethnographic study of online religious groups, notes three key findings: “(1) Online involvement is not causing people to leave their local church”; “(2) people join online communities primarily for relationships, not information”; and “(3) the characteristics of online communities highlighted offer a picture of what individuals envision and hope a church or Christian community would be like” (pp. 223-225). Her study, and particularly the last part, indicates that digital interaction complements and challenges traditional churches. She expands on the point:

Overall members described online community as valuable in their spiritual lives and growth. Many emphasized experiencing more care, fellowship, and
encouragement online than they received in their real-world church. Members also valued online prayer, support, and having access to teaching/discussion on topics not available in their local church. (Campbell, 2003, p. 223)

Campbell also points out the self-understanding of the various online Christian groups she studied corresponds quite well with Dulles’ (1974) models of the church, especially those manifesting the Church as communion, as servant/herald, and as sacrament.

In another study of online religious use, Linderman and Lövheim (2003) found that people combined both information seeking and community.

When asked about the significance of the computer-mediated interaction in which they participated, the majority of those answering the questionnaire mentioned that they had encountered new types of information, explored new issues, and thereby expanded their knowledge in matters of religion and spirituality. Some of the informants emphasized the extended ability to get into contact with people with similar interests and experiences in the area of religion. Several informants also found the religious dialogue interesting since the computer-mediated interaction allowed for a wider array of possible input compared to interaction taking place within traditional religious contexts. (p. 235)

However, after reviewing all of their findings, Linderman and Lövheim conclude that, rather than investigating whether digital communication encourages a different religious practice, researchers should ask “whether CMC [computer-mediated communication] facilitates or renders more difficult certain forms of social relations and identities.” These questions of identity and trust “connect to the processes of religious change already underway in late modern society” (p. 238).

This conclusion aligns quite well with the observations of Stewart Hoover, the director of the ongoing Media and Religion Project at the University of Colorado, who finds that people make use of new technologies—the most studied are television and the Internet—in order to fill a gap; rather than the technologies replacing or somehow changing religion, the technologies fulfill a need for people who have already experienced religious change. Commenting on a study of religion in a small town in England, Hoover identifies three key trends:

First, the fact of the seeking, questing, autonomous self; second, the re-articulation of what we used to call “religion” into something else, something less problematic—most commonly “spirituality,” or “the spiritual”; and a third, the fact that a marketplace of supply exists, even in this small town, outside the bounds of traditional religion. Sociologists such as Robert Wuthnow have called these trends
a “restructuring” of religion, away from a situation where religious institutions and histories are definitive to a situation where individual practice, according to its own logic, becomes more definitive. (2003, p. 12).

Subject to a wealth of information and materials and able to contact others with similar interests, individuals more and more use the interactive capabilities of the Internet, for example, to create their own religious space online.

Stephen O’Leary sees the move to digital resources and practices as a continuation, in some ways, of the Reformation movement from the spoken word to the written word, a change that led to a reinterpretation of central Christian rituals. “The theology that followed from the devaluation of ritual language, gesture, and performance in favor of preaching, thus changed the communion ceremony from its former status as an actual vehicle of God’s presence and grace to a mere reminder or analogy” (1996, p. 790). In his analysis of the online practices of religious groups, he finds them creating their own written and symbolized ritual practices to bond the group more closely together and to accomplish their religious identity. The interactive use of the Internet leads to a further reinterpretation of religious language and practices. For these individuals, religious identity comes from the online practice—something that, for marginalized groups like Wicca or atheists, benefits from the privacy and anonymity of the Internet. The world-wide interactive nature of the Internet allows these marginal groups to find similar minded individuals with whom they can create an identity and reinforce their beliefs.

Like the printing press before them, then, the digital technologies provide an enabling technology for religiously minded individuals to find information, to create communities, to perform rituals, and even to develop a systematic understanding or theology to ground their practices. Like the printing press, the digital technologies operate outside the scope of existing religious institutions, though they borrow from them—texts, beliefs, even members. Like the printing press, they also offer religious institutions new ways of enacting their own identity and recruitment. Unlike the printing press, the digital technologies empower ordinary users: virtually anyone can publish online and can do so without the support of a community.

II. Evangelization

This digital world forms the context for evangelization today. While the Church’s mission to proclaim the good news of Jesus has not changed, the circumstances in which that proclamation takes place has, as we have seen. So, too, has the place of religious institutions and histories, as Wuthnow claims. At the very least, we can say, with Pope John Paul II, that the proclamation of the Gospel occurs in yet another Areopagus:
The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a “global village.” The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. … There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications. … there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques, and a new psychology. (Redemptoris Missio, no. 37)

The various statements of the Pontifical Council on Social Communication that deal with the Internet (2002a, 2002b) echo this sentiment.

To better understand the task of evangelization in this digital culture, we would do well to return with Pope John Paul II to Evangelii Nuntiandi. Here Paul VI clearly states the two dimensions of evangelization, dividing it into two tasks: the evangelization of individuals and the evangelization of culture.

The evangelization of individuals requires an address to the heart of each person. It consists of “the carrying forth of the good news to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter into the hearts of individuals and renew the human race” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 18). This evangelization finds expression not only in the preaching of the Gospel but in acts of charity, the witness of holy lives, works of mercy, forgiveness—the living out of the Gospel. It requires not just information, but true communication (Ong, 1996). As Campbell reports, participants in online religious groups seek more than information.

The second aspect of evangelization, the evangelization of culture, seeks to change the values and judgments of culture:

We speak of sectors of the human race that must be transformed, for the purpose of the Church is not confined to preaching the Gospel in ever extending territories and proclaiming it to ever increasing multitudes of people. She seeks by virtue of the Gospel to affect and, as it were, recast the criteria of judgment, the standard of values, the incentives and life standards of the human race which are inconsistent with the word of God and the plan of salvation. (Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 19)
This, too, differs greatly from supplying information or preaching to a group. Such a change builds on the conversion of individuals and their willingness to provide a religious context for others to hear the Gospel.

Like the printing press before them, digital technologies can provide one aspect of individual evangelization by supplying information, making the Gospel texts and other Christian texts available to a world-wide audience (Pontifical Council, 2002a, no. 5). The interactive potential of the Internet furnishes something further: an infrastructure for community support and even for the formation of what Brown and Duguid refer to as an as *imagined* community—the textual community shaped around the Christian message. In these limited senses, evangelization can benefit from the digital technologies and, as both Popes Paul VI and John Paul II urge, the Church should not hesitate to make use of all means possible for evangelization. It should, however, not reduce evangelization to a purely *instrumental* process solved by available technology. As we have seen from the case of print culture, communication technology, while exerting a powerful influence and creating some new structures, ultimately works with existing structures. As the very psychology of evangelization demands personal commitment, the digital technologies face certain limitations. Insofar as they aid the personal, they can aid evangelization.

Digital technologies also afford a context for the expression and deeper understanding of values. Indeed, as they themselves enforce a value system on two levels, they can cooperate in the Gospel task of shaping “the criteria of judgment” necessary for human life. At its surface expression, the Internet, for example, embraces values of diversity, open publication, free access to information, and cooperation. Thus, documents and websites multiply; index services guide users to what they seek; strangers interact in helpful manners. At its foundational technical or electronic structural level, the values of collaboration, cooperation, and respect are even more stringently enforced: the entire system will not work without this level of cooperation. Though people’s motivations might vary (seeking the common good, working for profit, promoting a national agenda, and so on), all embrace a strong ethic that does bear the stamp of Christianity’s presence in Western culture. Here the Church may well benefit from a dialogue with the technologists, much as it enters a dialogue with various religious bodies.

**III. Challenges**

Finally, with this background, we can turn to the challenges to evangelization. Just as “evangelization” has two senses, so also does the English word, “challenge”—one a negative sense (an obstacle to be overcome) and one a positive sense (an opportunity). *The digital technologies provide both obstacles and opportunities for evangelization—and sometimes at the same time.*
As we have before, we can begin with the lessons drawn from the similarities of the digital technologies to print culture. Both printing technology and the digital technologies change the situation for cultural groups by promoting the wider circulation of ideas, new forms for the presentation of information, new tools to manage information, new theories or understanding of cultural knowledge, new communities, and a new locus for religious thought and activity. Each of these offers both an obstacle and an opportunity to the Church in its work of evangelization. The increased flow of ideas among cultures presents the Church with the opportunity to provide greater information more directly to more people; at the same time, it also means the Church becomes one information source among many others. Here the obstacle resides in distinguishing the Church’s message from the others. As Jans notes, “the presence of ‘true doctrine’ is just one among many: in our contemporary areopagus, in the shape of the information highway, everything . . . is exhibited, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church or Christians for the Cloning of Jesus are only one mouse click away from each other” (2002, p. 62). In its favor the Catholic Church has its history as a community of faith and its widely recognized teaching authority—which, if we dare to use the language of marketing, constitutes one of the best-known religious “brands.” Even those who do not know the teachings of the Catholic Church recognize its long witness to the faith through martyrdom and works of charity. To take advantage of this opportunity for evangelization requires that the Church be present in every way in the digital world, especially by introducing people to the witness of its life.

The new forms for the presentation of ideas and the new locus for religious thought offer both the chance to make the Gospel resonate with the lives of contemporary peoples and the invitation to many others to actively and publicly reflect on their experience of the Gospel. On the other hand, these forms may well seem so foreign to traditional Christian expression as to seem beyond evaluation; moreover, those creating them work independently of Church supervision. Here, too, the Church can take its digital place by fostering the witness of its members and resisting the temptation to control what happens. The Church can also deepen its understanding of the digital world by asking important questions. For example, one key question that demands ongoing reflection is whether the content of faith changes with the mode or media of its presentation. As these new technologies offer new forms for religious expression, we should attend to what a new generation of religious thinkers might say to the Church.

These new forms remind us that the digital technologies, like the others before them, also affect language. Like the printing press, digital technologies change the context of language—where we use language and how we use it. But where the printing press fostered the various vernacular languages, the Internet, for one, seems to encourage the use of just one: English-language sites predominate. This may change over time, but for now we see a kind of enforced “orthography” in language as well as in the form of presentation (icons, gif images, and so on). The digital technologies also further a change in language use: hypertext replaces the linear patterns of essays, documents, and narratives. Finally, digital languages, as people presently use them, have
a strong interpersonal force: email and chat remain by far the most popular forms. The digital languages connect people.

The new technologies connect people in ways unimagined in an earlier era; but they can also pull people from their communities of physical location. The more time spent in an online community, the less spent with the local or parish community. The research into people’s online religious activity suggests some lessons here. More and more online participants seek a sense of community they do not find in their local churches. To supply it, the Church’s evangelization efforts can and should promote interactive connections among people, but obstacles lie on either side of this effort. The Church wants neither to take people from the local community nor to stifle their proper longings for what Brown and Duguid (1995), quoting Benedict Anderson, call an imagined community.

An imagined community is quite distinct from an imaginary community. It is one, Anderson notes, whose members “will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Where an imaginary community does not exist, an imagined one exists on too large a scale to be known in any other way. And the central way they can be imagined is through the documents they share.

Traditional sources of Catholic community have rested on precisely such shared documents, which in the past encompassed the liturgy (particularly the highly standardized Latin liturgy), doctrinal formulations, catechisms, papal documents, devotional practices, and other markers of Catholicism. In this context, evangelization today must bring people simultaneously into physical and imagined communities—into the local community that participates in a larger, universal community. For this to work, the local communities must themselves undergo transformation and become places of welcome, caring, and warmth.

Just as the Church’s message appears as one among many in the abundance of the digital world, so too does the Church’s community. The research into online religious activity indicates that people’s definitions of religious identity do not arise first from religious institutions. Instead, individuals seek ways to forge their own identities, often from multiple sources. The same impetus moves individuals to seek a “spirituality” rather than align themselves with a religious group. While this sociological insight deserves greater study (Lyon, 2000), it holds out an opportunity for evangelization through an invitation to the rich spiritual tradition of the Church. Here, one needs a spiritual guide—something the interactive nature of the digital technology can enable. This kind of evangelization must be personal and demands a certain humility, so the digital presence of the Church become such as not to “bruise the broken reed.”
The Church’s evangelization efforts can also learn from the errors of print culture. Two stand out: authority and structure. At the beginnings of print technology, governments and churches sought to control the new media and to assert their authority by coercion and censorship rather than, in our terms, to evangelize the culture. This kind of evangelization rests less on force than on understanding. Since the Church exists within human cultures, it both shapes and is shaped by those cultures. Effective evangelization begins with dialogue, a dialogue symbolized by the interactive qualities of digital culture. Since the culture of the digital world expresses itself through an ethic of equality and exchange, the Church must “learn the local language” in evangelization. *This need not mean that the evangelical message has no authority, but that the authority draws its expression from its own integrity*, much as St. Paul preached Christ crucified rather than the wisdom of the Greeks. A similar lesson applies to structure. The early period of print culture tried simply to move the dominant oral and manuscript culture to print, along with their supporting university, chancellery, and ecclesiastical structures. But the print culture itself so dramatically changed schools, governments, and churches that it took centuries for the existing institutions to adjust. *The digital cultures demand flexibility: one cannot simply transfer print resources to an electronic form—the structures do not work the same way.* An evangelization in the digital culture will differ from the evangelization developed by the Church over the last centuries. Here, too, the focus must remain on Christ and not on any past method.

**IV. Evangelization in a Digital Culture**

An effective evangelization combines four activities of the Church: witness, service, worship, and reflection or theology (see Scharer & Hilberath, 2002, chap. 1). The four appear in a different form when Dulles (1974) refers to them as models of the Church (herald model, servant model, sacrament model, held together in a communion model by an institutional structure). Dulles uses the models or activities to identify ways to understand ourselves as church. But these activities also can help us understand how the Church presents itself and proclaims the message of the Gospel; they can offer a guide to evangelization today. Some of these activities seem more suited to the digital world than others (witness, service, community, for example, seem more amenable to an online manifestation than do sacraments or institutions). Therein we can find the opportunity for evangelization in the digital age.

The question, even in its modern form, bears ancient marks. In the sixth century, Cassiodorus pondered writing as a means to proclaim the Gospel. He urged monks to take up “the apostolate of the pen”:

…to preach…by means of the hand, to untie the tongue by means of the fingers…to fight the Devil…with pen and ink. Every word of the Lord written by the scribe is a wound inflicted on Satan…Though seated in one spot, the scribe
traverses diverse lands through the dissemination of what he has written. (qtd. by Eisenstein, 1979, p. 373)

We might say the same about evangelization in the digital age.

References


“Hacker” Ethics And The Christian Vision

By Antonio Spadaro S.J.

[Father Spadaro is an Italian Jesuit priest, journalist, and writer. He has been the editor in chief of the Jesuit-affiliated journal La Civiltà Cattolica and a consultor to the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Secretariat for Communications. His books include: Cybertheology; Friending God: Social Media, Spirituality, and Community; and Cybergrace.]

Who Are the Hackers?

The term hacker has entered common usage because newspapers and the television, as well as films and novels, have widely associated it with an ample sequence of phenomena such as the violation of secrets, codes and passwords, of protected IT systems, etc., Although the media has imposed this image on the hackers, in reality the so-called “IT pirates” have another name: cracker. The term hacker identifies a much more complex and constructive figure: “hackers build things, crackers break them.”¹ This definition was written by Eric Raymond the current editor of Jargon File, a sort of dictionary for hackers.

In 1984 Stephen Levy in his book Hackers wrote down what he called the “seven commandments of the personal computer revolution.”² Levy essentially set down a series of attitudes that had matured years earlier – in the 1960s and 1970s – when a generation of young people with a passion for computers emerged in San Francisco’s Bay Area, the early hackers.

1) Access to computers should be unlimited and total.
2) Always yield to the Hands-On Imperative!
3) All information should be free.
4) Mistrust authority–promote decentralization.
5) Hackers should be judged by their hacking.
6) You can create art and beauty on a computer
7) Computers can change your life for the better.

I’d like here to take inspiration from the fourth and the sixth commandments which are about authority and the meaning of creativity in order to understand if, and how, the hacker ethics could be insightful (and also compatible) with the Christian vision, the Christian weltanschauung.

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Authority: The Cathedral and the Bazaar

The Levy vision is founded on playful and creative decentralization and on an authority engendered by shared and decentralized knowledge. The classic example is represented by Wikipedia. Clay Shirky is reflecting on this sort of Cognitive Surplus, which is the title of a famous book of his. He believes this surplus is distinguishing itself as an emergent and vital force, capable of gathering a delocalized and fragmented knowledge and of aggregating it to something new. This sharing does not answer to any center nor authority. It is a sort of biological process of growth and extension.

In a famous essay entitled The Cathedral and the Bazaar, E. S. Raymond contrasts two research models. The first is the cathedral mode in which the program is developed by a limited number of experts based on a hierarchical partitioning. The second is the bazaar mode where development is decentralized, and there is no rigorous division of tasks. The cathedral thus becomes a metaphor of a system where roles are clear-cut, defined and hierarchic. The bazaar, on the other hand, is the metaphor of an open system.

Pekka Himanen, in his seminal The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age, takes this distinction relying on other metaphors, the academia and the monastery. Once again, a religious reference. The academic model is platonic in origin and stems from a collective research process based on exchange and self-regulation. The monastic model thus appears to be closed and hierarchical, involving only a limited number of people where the target to be achieved is defined once for all.

The Logic of Faith: Network or Communion?

At this point, a question must be asked: isn’t hacker ethic on a collision course with the Catholic mens and its vision of authority and tradition? Are collaborative action and principle of authority in an intrinsically radical opposition?

Why have we to put these questions? Because with the diffusion of social networks the bazaar model is today becoming a mentality. The notion is spreading that sharing on a wide scale is key in the production and dissemination of ideas and knowledge. The success of modern technology available on the Net, which is made up of the web 2.0 ecosystem, is changing our social scenario. Specifically, we note the Net entails the connection of resources, time, ideas to be shared generously and anarchically. The Christian faith is called insistently to relate with this kind of forma mentis. The participation in the digital environment, in a natural way, is not indifferent to the way in which man lives his own spirituality and life of faith. So, it requires a new form of apologetics that cannot but develop from the changed categories of comprehension of the world and access to knowledge.
One of the critical points of the hacker and open source vision lies in the intrinsic limit of all sharing. The Network model, which reflects this dimension most radically is the so-called peer-to-peer (P2P) which possesses no hierarchical nodes such as clients and servers, but a number of open nodes connected to other nodes of the Network which transmit and receive and vice versa.

In other words, the peer-to-peer logic is based on the fact I do not receive something in its entirety from a single source, a depositum. In more general terms: I share what I have at the very moment when I receive it. But I do not receive a content in its entirety: I receive it in a process which makes of me a node on a shared network of exchange, and which in turn makes me richer, so to speak, when I give the gift I have received at the moment of doing so. If this logic of sharing is considered, on a theological level, then we understand that it is problematic because the nature of the Church and the dynamics of the Christian Revelation seem to follow a client-server model which is just the opposite of the P2P. They are not the product of a horizontal exchange, which could be defined more precisely as an ongoing barter, but the opening to an inexhaustible Grace.

It passes through human mediation and ministers of worship; it is communicated through embodied mediations. The logic of Grace, instead, creates face-to-face links, as is typical of the logic of the gift, something which is alien to the logic of the peer-to-peer, which, in itself, is a logic of connection and of exchange, not of communion. And a face can never be reduced to a mere peer, a node. Here lies the challenge for Christian believers: the Net as a place of connection is set to become a place of communion.

We risk reaching a radical incompatibility between the logic of theology and that of the Net. The risk of forma mentis of the hacker kind is to lead to an understanding of the communion as being a connection and the gift as a gratuity because the spotlight focuses on those who take but not those who receive. The gratia gratis data instead cannot be taken but can be received. The Revelation’s knowledge order is peculiar: man cannot reach it by means of his own strength. It is instead by an entirely free decision that God has revealed himself and given himself to man.6 It is a gift.

Ecclesiology, in turn, cannot be reduced to a sociology of ecclesial relations: “The Church is in history, but, at the same time, she transcends it. It is only ‘with the eyes of faith’ that one can see her in her visible reality and, at the same time, in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life.”7 The Church is not, and will never be, simply a cognitive society, while grace is a notion far different from information. These are the reflections that the Catholic vision of authority poses in a critical manner to hacker culture.
The Surplus of the Spirit and Creativity

In short, in the challenge that hacker mentality is starting to pose to theology and faith, what must be preserved is the human ability for transcendence, for a gift that cannot be lessened, for a grace that goes through the system of relations which is never exclusively the outcome of a connection or a sharing, no matter how extensive and generous. In other words: it is necessary to remind contemporary man that life and its meaning cannot be entirely, and definitely, explained in a horizontal network; mankind continues to aspire transcendence. But having said that, it would be necessary to say also, the hacker community does not reject all forms of authority. E. Raymond himself writes, in fact, that being anti-authoritarian does not mean fighting all authority. A hacker-inspired governance can thus help to better understand the basic assumptions and the effects of a distributed authority.

A critical exchange, serious and not complacent, with the hacker spirit may help us understand that the transcendental foundation of faith sets in motion a process that is open, creative, collaborative, and collegial. Appealing to creativity, in addition, can help understand how “the Spirit edifies, animates and sanctifies the Church,” living within its body, animating it from within. How?

As the digital society is not understandable only through the broadcast contents, but primarily through the relationships, so the Church: the sharing of contents takes place within relationships. The Church is called to go deeper into the exercise of authority. Witnessing the Gospel is not a matter of "broadcasting" contents, but of “sharing” them in a context of relationships. Maybe we should not talk about “media” anymore. We should talk about “connective texture.”

What Clay Shirky defines as surplus does occur in the ecclesial framework. Nevertheless, the outcome of the effort of believers is not exclusively immanent. It is, rather, a surplus that sanctifies the action of the Spirit, that revitalizes the members of the body mystic. Christ in fact participated with his Spirit, which alone and identical in the head and bodily members, vivifies, unites, the entire body, making it more dynamic. The dynamic element of the Church, that which makes it more than just the sum of its parts, is the Holy Spirit.

The Playful Effort of Creation

Is there a place in the hacker theory where the transcendental dimension could be found quite easily? I think we could find it in the hacker’s vision of the meaning of the human life. Pekka Himanen develops a reflection that, starting from these assumptions, one comes into direct contact with theology. As can be read in a key paragraph in the book, the basic issue of the hacker ethic is, in fact, “the meaning of life.”
Himanen articulates a profound criticism of the Protestant ethical approach, intended in Max Weber’s capitalistic sense (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism), which imposes what he defines as “the Fridayization of Sunday.” His attack is mainly directed against a certain way to understand life as being totally over-balanced on the optimization of work, dictated by the clock, by performance and by efficiency. It is a vision that, rather than being idealized, is instead, clearly theological in origin. As can be read in a key paragraph in the book, the basic issue is in fact “the meaning of life”: “One might say that Christianity’s original answer to the question ‘What is the purpose of life?’ was: the purpose of life is Sunday.”

Reflecting on Augustine, who is writing about Genesis against the Manicheans, but also on Dante and other Christian classical writers, Himanen observes the Reformation shifted life’s center of gravity from Sunday to Friday. The hacker ethic aims to affirm that the purpose of life is closer to Sunday than to Friday. It is not difficult to grasp the intuition of a life blessed in the genetic code of the hacker’s vision of life, the intuition that the human being is called to have another life, to fully realize his humanity.

Obviously, the hacker is not a person who indulges in idleness and inclined to doing sweet nothing. On the contrary, he is active; he pursues his passions, and there is creative effort and knowledge without end in his life. Yet he is aware that his humanity is not realized within the framework of rigidly-organized time, but within the flexible rhythm of a creativity that must, once again, become the measure of a truly human work, one which best corresponds to the nature of man.

Tom Pittman, one of the first hacker philosophers, in his manifesto, Deus ex machina, or the true computerist, attempts to give an idea of what a true hacker feels during this creative process: “I, as a Christian, thought I could feel something of the satisfaction that God must have felt when He created the world.” Presenting himself as “a Christian and Technologist,” Pittman interprets this action as an emotional participation in God’s creative work.

The Saturday of the Global Village

The place in the hacker theory where the transcendental dimension occurs with ease is the radical appeal to the fact that the Shabbat, the Saturday (the Sunday, in Christian terms) is man’s real home, his true existential dimension. The Jewish Saturday or Christian Sunday, of course, must not be reduced to rest. Yet the Sunday of the hacker is not simply a holiday: there lives within it, an implicit reference to God, as creative origin of the world. Here we recognize a fruitful seed of transcendence.

Creation is a position to give to the hacker a vision of the world and of humanity, that transcendental vanishing point without which that vision may end up in a colorful but
nevertheless blind alley. Himanen quotes the words of Justin Martyr: “Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior, on the same day, rose from the dead.”\textsuperscript{17}

It is at this point that Himanen asks a question he discovers in St. Augustine: “Why did God create the world?.” He continues: “The hacker’s answer to Augustine’s question is that God, as a perfect being, did not need to do anything at all, but he wanted to create.”\textsuperscript{18} In the story of the free and irreducible creative action of God, the hacker recognizes the image of his existence: “Genesis can be seen as a tale of the kind of activity that occurs on creativity’s own terms. In it, talents are used imaginatively. It reflects the joy one feels when one surprises and surpasses oneself.”\textsuperscript{19} Tom Pittman, one of the first hacker philosophers, in his manifesto, \textit{Deus ex machina, or the true computerist}, attempts to give an idea of what a true hacker feels during his creative process: “I, as a Christian, thought I could feel something of the satisfaction God must have felt when He created the world.”

If the hacker biblical model of creativity is not deprived of its deeper theological value, it is then able to maintain a memory of a beginning that is the outcome of a creative act of God. In this vision, the hacker ethic may even have a prophetic resonance in today’s world which is totally committed to the logic of profit: to remind us that the “human hearts are yearning for a world where love endures, where gifts are shared.”\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Endnotes}

1 E. S. RAYMOND, How to become a Hacker in \url{http://catb.org/~esr/faqs/hacker-howto.html}


4 E. S. RAYMOND, The Cathedral and the Bazaar, in \url{http://www.catb.org/esr/writings/homesteading/}


6 Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 50.
7 Ivi, n. 770.

8 E. S. RAYMOND, How to become a Hacker…, cit.

9 Cfr http://www.mozilla.org/about/governance.html

10 Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 145.

11 Lumen gentium, n. 7.


13 Cfr ivi, 16.

14 Ivi, 18.

15 cit. ivi.


17 Ivi, 150.

18 Ivi, 151.

19 Ivi.

20 BENEDETTO XVI, Message for the 43rd World Communications Day.
The Episcopal Conference In The Communications Marketplace: Issues And Challenges For Catholic Identity And Ecclesiology

By Brian Lucas, S.T.L.

[Father Lucas has served as General Secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference. He has qualifications in law, media, and theology. There has been some controversy in Australia about his administrative role; however, this is a valuable documented study of the legal and communication aspects of bishops’ conferences.]

Abstract

This paper involves a theological reflection on what communication practices, technologies, and patterns mean for the life and identity of the Church.

In particular it deals with the role of the Bishops’ Conference in the area of social communications and the tensions that arise regarding the respective roles of the diocesan bishop and the Episcopal Conference, including lay heads of ecclesial agencies, in presenting “the face of the Church” in the public forum. Practical resolution of these tensions must respect the ecclesiology that determines the teaching role of the bishops and the collegial dimension of the episcopacy.

The paper is divided into two sections:

1. The Church as “visible institution” and the ecclesiological and juridical foundations for identifying those who represent it in the public forum

2. The Episcopal Conference as an expression of episcopal collegiality and a voice in the communications marketplace.

1. The Church as “visible institution” and the ecclesiological juridical foundations for identifying those who represent it in the public forum.

Our starting point in understanding how the Church is a visible institution, is the well-known passage from paragraph 8 of Lumen Gentium which described the Church as “constituted and organized in the world as a society”, and “is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.” The appendix refers to “hierarchical communion” and notes:34

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…hierarchical communion with the head and members of the church is required. Communion is a notion which is held in high honor in the ancient Church (and also today, especially in the East). However, it is not understood as some kind of vague disposition, but as an organic reality which requires a juridical form and is animated by charity.

The Church exists in space and time. The Church has a formal structure or juridical form, and this is most often seen in its hierarchical expression, namely, in the office of the pope and the college of bishops.

This is not the only means whereby the Church is seen to exist in the world. The Church is truly all of Christ’s faithful as the introductory paragraph to *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* set out:

> To intensify the apostolic activity of the people of God, the most holy synod earnestly addresses itself to the laity, whose proper and indispensable role in the mission of the Church has already been dealt with in other documents. The apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it. Sacred Scripture clearly shows how spontaneous and fruitful such activity was at the very beginning of the Church (cf. Acts 11:19-21; 18:26; Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:3).

All have a responsibility to make Christ present in the world including through the effective use of the means of social communication:

> All the children of the Church should join, without delay and with the greatest effort in a common work to make effective use of the media of social communication in various apostolic endeavors, as circumstances and conditions demand.

The way in which the Church is present has varied throughout history. We can begin with the small gathering of believers who went to the Temple every day and who met for prayer, fellowship, and the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42 – 47).

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35 *Apostolicam Actuositatem* n 1.
37 *Inter Mirifica* 13.
Even those expressions of faith that were intended to be private, found public expression, as St Athanasius wrote of the hermit Antony:

For not from writings, nor from worldly wisdom, nor through any art, was Antony renowned, but solely from his piety towards God. That this was the gift of God no one will deny. For from whence into Spain and into Gaul, how into Rome and Africa, was the man heard of who abode hidden in a mountain, unless it was God who makes His own known everywhere, who also promised this to Antony at the beginning? For even if they work secretly, even if they wish to remain in obscurity, yet the Lord shows them as lamps to lighten all, that those who hear may thus know that the precepts of God are able to make men prosper and thus be zealous in the path of virtue.

Later through the monasteries, cathedrals, and other material expressions of Catholic life, the presence of the Church was pervasive. Even in what is now regarded as a “secular age” there are ample manifestations of the Church’s presence in the world, notwithstanding the pressures to confine religious faith to the private sphere.

This “institutional” presence of the Church is often misunderstood and misrepresented. The words “institution” and “hierarchy” generally invite pejorative connotations, certainly in the Australian culture which prides itself on its egalitarianism. Yet the lived experience of people is that the Church comprises many institutions of which they are rightly proud. In Australia we have 1700 Catholic schools, a network of public and private hospitals, aged care and welfare agencies, and publications. Clearly the Church is an institution of institutions. It has a visible dimension and is recognised as such by its members and the community at large.

The Church that gives itself the name Catholic Church, and is often described as the Roman Catholic Church, claims that brand and the identity that goes with it. It accepts there is an institutional aspect to its existence.

At the present time there is a general mood in the community that shies away from institutional religion or “denominationalism.” Many people prefer a nebulous broad-based Christianity without structure or organisation.

On that question, this comment by Dr Richard Lennan is helpful:

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38 Athanasius Life of St Antony n 93 http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2811.htm
Like any group of people that is more than a random gathering, the people who form the Church need to be able to identify one another, to know what binds them together as a group, to have opportunities and means to share their life together, to be able to resolve differences, and also to pass on their faith.

It seems clear that there has to be some external basis for identifying a community, or particular activities, or institutions as “Catholic.” Something is not “Catholic” just because it wants to say it is.

We need to consider, however, what it is about the Church’s visibility that constitutes its identity. How is a Catholic school recognised as Catholic? If a bishop speaks on television, is he seen to represent the whole Catholic Church? When leading lay Catholics comment on church or secular affairs, are they representing “the Church?”

Elsewhere I have offered some thoughts on the role of bishops in defining, safeguarding, and promoting “Catholic mission and identity”, or what one might call the “Catholic” brand.40

Bishops have a responsibility to guard and protect the deposit of faith, but how, in a practical sense, do they identify an association, or institution or activity as “Catholic?” How does the Church communicate this “Catholic identity?”

A useful starting point in responding to these types of question is the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Church law is the practical result of theological reflection on the Church’s self-understanding. That self-understanding includes an awareness of a distinctive identity and presence in the world. Church law provides a mechanism for regulating that identity.

- Canon 216 acknowledges that all Christ’s faithful, since they share the Church’s mission, have a right to promote and support apostolic action. It then says, “no initiative, however, can lay claim to the title “catholic” without the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority.”41

- Canon 300 requires that, “no association may call itself ‘catholic’ except with the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority, in accordance with canon 312.”


41 Canon 216
Since they share the Church's mission, all Christ's faithful have the right to promote and support apostolic action, by their own initiative, undertaken according to their state and condition. No initiative, however, can lay claim to the title 'catholic' without the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority.
• Canon 312 identifies as the competent authority, the Holy See for international associations, the Episcopal Conference for national associations, and the diocesan bishop for local associations.42

These canons presume there is such a thing as a Catholic identity and provide a mechanism to safeguard it.

This has its parallels in the secular world where brand protection is fundamental to corporate good governance. Secular laws relating to trademarks, logos, business names, “passing off”, misleading and deceptive conduct, restraints of trade, and anticompetitive practices, all presuppose the right of an entity to have a brand, a distinctive identity, and to safeguard its brand and prevent others using or abusing it.

Catholic identity can be compromised, or at least obscured, depending on how individual members and particular organisations or institution relate to the rest of the Church, how they relate to ecclesial authority, and how they conduct their affairs.

Archbishop Michael Miller, Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, in a paper delivered on 31 October 2005, at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, said this:43

On several occasions Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger expressed his views on the role and importance of Catholic institutions. In one place he argued, for example, that it might be better for the Church not to expend her resources trying to preserve institutions, whether universities, hospitals or social service agencies, if their Catholic identity had been seriously compromised.

By way of example, we understand the importance of the Church’s educational institutions in presenting an image of the Church. There are specific canons relating to the catholicity of

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42 Canon. 312
§1 The authority which is competent to establish public associations is:
1° the Holy See, for universal and international associations;
2° the Episcopal Conference in its own territory, for national associations which by their very establishment are intended for work throughout the whole nation;
3° the diocesan Bishop, each in his own territory, but not the diocesan Administrator, for diocesan associations, with the exception, however, of associations the right to whose establishment is reserved to others by apostolic privilege.

§2 The written consent of the diocesan Bishop is required for the valid establishment of an association or branch of an association in the diocese, even though it is done in virtue of an apostolic privilege. Permission, however, which is given by the diocesan Bishop for the foundation of a house of a religious institute, is valid also for the establishment in the same house, or in a church attached to it, of an association which is proper to that institute.

Bishops have an important supervisory role even with respect to schools conducted by religious institutes. An important question is the connection between the Church’s mission and its religious identity. In simple terms, people may ask whether this or that institution is “authentically Catholic.”

In the beginning, as we understand from St Paul’s letters, (e.g. 2 Tim 4:3-4), the community understood that there was such a thing as “false teaching” and there were “false teachers” who were a threat to the community’s cohesion and identity.

Very early a mechanism was devised to protect the community, safeguard the faith and identify error. That responsibility, in the very broadest sense, we can associate today with the bishops. They have a supervisory authority as illustrated, set out, in the canons mentioned above.

The question however is not so much what is or is not “Catholic” but, rather, what image of the Catholic Church should be presented.

Again using the example of Catholic educational institutions - Is the Church catering in its educational institutions for the wealthy elite, for an upwardly mobile middle class, or is it providing an education to those marginalized in society who otherwise may not have access to education?

These three possibilities will portray three different images of the Church and the Church’s identity and its identification with one individual or group will be critical to how others understand its proclamation of the message of Jesus.

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44 Can. 803
§1 A catholic school is understood to be one which is under the control of the competent ecclesiastical authority or of a public ecclesiastical juridical person, or one which in a written document is acknowledged as catholic by the ecclesiastical authority.
§ Formation and education in a catholic school must be based on the principles of catholic doctrine, and the teachers must be outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life.
§3 No school, even if it is in fact Catholic, may bear the title ‘catholic’ except by the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Canon 804
§1 The formation and education in the catholic religion provided in any school, and through various means of social communication, is subject to the authority of the Church. It is for the Episcopal Conference to issue general norms concerning this field of activity and for the diocesan Bishop to regulate and watch over it.
§2 The local Ordinary is to be careful that those who are appointed as teachers of religion in schools, even non-catholic ones, are outstanding in true doctrine, in the witness of their Christian life, and in their teaching ability.

45 Cf Canon 806.
Article 9 of the Bull of Induction for the Jubilee Year put the following perspective on the Church’s visible presence:\(^{47}\)

Having received from Christ the power to forgive in his name (cf. Mt 16:19; Jn 20:23), the Church is in the world as the living presence of the love of God who leans down to every human weakness in order to gather it into the embrace of his mercy.

Our challenge in the way we use the means of social communication to communicate something of the Church’s identity is to be able to present a face of the Church that reveals the face of Jesus.

Identifying error and rooting out heresy has its place, but Catholic identity is more than just orthodoxy of doctrine. The Church as institution, and the institutions within the Church, should be a means whereby the visible dimension of the Catholic community becomes known, and known authentically, as a community that is engaged in all that serves mankind’s true well-being.\(^{48}\) Catholic health and education institutions reflect the very nature of the Church. As Pope Benedict has expressed it:\(^{49}\)

> The true subject of the various Catholic organizations that carry out a ministry of charity is the Church herself—at all levels, from the parishes, through the particular Churches, to the universal Church.

The bishops have a role to safeguard the faith, and all Catholics, individually and through the institutions they manage, have a role to promote the faith. In practice, however, who will present this face of the Church, the face of Jesus?

From the perspective of the public in general, and politicians and the professional media in particular, any person with any official position in the Church is seen to be able to speak on behalf of the whole Church.

Comments made via any medium, anywhere, can be taken to apply to the Church across a nation and even internationally. It is particularly newsworthy if Church officials can be seen to be


\(^{48}\) Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* 13 “Out of regard for Christ and in view of the mystery that constitutes the Church's own life, the Church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves man's true welfare, any more than she can remain indifferent to what threatens it. In various passages in its documents the Second Vatican Council has expressed the Church's fundamental solicitude that life in "the world should conform more to man's surpassing dignity" in all its aspects, so as to make that life "ever more human". http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis_en.html

\(^{49}\) *Deus Caritas Est* n 32.
disagreeing, even if the disagreements are not real. It suits politicians if the views of the Church are not seen to be unanimous, for they can be largely ignored or, at least, played off against one another. Hence the Australian Treasurer, Peter Costello was able, however jokingly, to refer to the “church of the bishops and the church of the Jesuits.”

Because it is important for an organisation to speak clearly with one voice at critical times, efficient, modern organisations appoint clearly identifiable spokespersons. Their message is clear, unequivocal, and not interrupted by comments from other members of the organisation, no matter how well intended such comments may be. One clear voice in a crowded room is more effective than many chattering voices, even if such voices are in agreement.

In some areas of Church life, that involve highly technical and specialised knowledge, it is most properly the role of expert laity to present the Church’s position. The Church’s practical experience in the areas of health care, social welfare, and education, qualify her to speak in the public forum. It is often the case that certain individuals within the Church are recognised as experts and are called on by the media to participate in the discussion of areas of public policy that relate to their work.

In Australia, if an issue arises concerning public policy in health care, media will invariably look for comment to the Chief Executive of Catholic Health Australia, which is the peak association of Catholic Health Care organisations. When he does comment he is “the face of the Church.” Yet there is no clear juridical basis for this role. His competence to speak comes from his expertise, not from any specific episcopal mandate. Generally, this does not present any problem in practice because of the competence of the individual, but structurally there is no mechanism for any “quality control” of the image of the Church presented in this way.

The Episcopal Conference is by its nature a bureaucratic structure. The various Bishop’s Commissions can gather research and information and assemble experts in particular areas of church life. It is not so much the Episcopal Conference then that presents an identity of the Church but rather the group of experts it gathers. Hence, I believe it is a mistake to regard the Episcopal Conference as a right institution to represent the Church’s identity. It is the role of Episcopal Conference staff to assist the national initiatives of the bishops. There is no reason why this cannot extend to allowing lay experts, employed by the Conference, to speak on the bishops’ behalf, and at their request, when matters requiring particular expertise are being


“The structures and procedures of a Conference should never become unduly rigid; instead, through constant reassessment and reappraisal, they should be adapted to suit the changing needs of the bishops. In order for a Conference to fulfil its proper function, care should be taken to ensure that the offices or commissions within a Conference strive to be of help to the bishops and not to substitute for them, and even less to create an intermediate structure between the Apostolic See and individual bishops.”
discussed. In doing so they are not usurping the teaching role of bishops but promoting it. The message is the bishops’ message and the Church’s message, not the message of the spokesperson.

Bishops are free to speak publicly. Generally, however, the good of the whole can be best served by supporting the collegial needs and strategic objectives of the wider Church.

The *Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* says:  

> Ecclesial communion will lead the Bishop to work constantly for the common good of the diocese, mindful that this is subordinated to the good of the universal Church…

One of the few areas of competence that the Second Vatican Council and later the *Code of Canon Law*, has given to Episcopal Conferences concerns radio and television. Some Canons describe the respective roles of the individual bishops and the Episcopal Conference of bishops regarding media. These include:

- **Canon 772 §1** The norms issued by the diocesan bishop concerning the exercise of preaching are to be observed by all.

- **Canon 772 §2** The prescriptions of the conference of bishops are to be observed in giving radio and television talks on Christian doctrine which “recognises both the tremendous influence of these modern media and the fact that they often carry a message well beyond the territorial boundaries of one diocese or even of a large region”

- **Canon 822 §1** The pastors of the Church, employing a right which belongs to the Church in fulfilling its responsibility, are to endeavour to make use of the instruments of social communication. This canon “admonishes the pastoral leaders of the Church (here meaning the bishops) to do their best to use the instruments of social communications (the press, cinema, radio, television, and similar mass media) as aids in carrying out the Church’s mission of teaching.”

- **Canon 831 §2** It is the responsibility of the conference of bishops to establish norms concerning the requirements for clerics and members of religious institutions to take part in radio or television programs which deal with questions concerning Catholic teaching.

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53. *ibid*, p 579.
or morals. This recognizes the importance of the electronic media as well as the fact that they transcend diocesan boundaries.  

A whole section of the *Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* deals with the role of the bishop and social communications (Chapter V section IV), but there is little practical guidance as to how the Episcopal Conference might deal with this canonical responsibility.

For preaching, norms can be promulgated by the diocesan bishop as this activity has limited reach. The wide coverage of the electronic media, beyond diocesan boundaries, meant that it was appropriate for the Episcopal Conference to be the instrumentality to regulate participation by clerics and religious and to make provisions relating to everyone who expounds Christian teaching in those media. Few Episcopal Conferences have promulgated such regulations in any significant way, other than generally to require that the participant have the permission of his or her proper Ordinary. For example, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has decreed that permission is required from the diocesan bishop of the place of original broadcast. It is problematic how effective such norms are in assisting the community to identify what is authentic. It fails to address the fundamental problem of identifying who will truly represent the face of the Church on the particular issue. There will be as many voices as there are diocesan bishops giving permissions.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference declined to make any regulations at the time it prepared its Complementary Norms following the promulgation of the new Code. In 1995 it again considered the matter and adopted the recommendation of Bishops Committee for the Media “not to establish a set of norms for clerics and religious to take part in radio and television programmes which concern Catholic doctrine or morals as such norms would be impossible to implement and would be interpreted by some as an unacceptable form of censorship.”

As a consequence, the presentation of the Catholic position in the traditional electronic media, and through the new forms of social media, is generally unregulated and largely out of the control of those who are ultimately responsible for safeguarding the faith.

It is a common experience in Australia, and probably in other places, that media make their own choices about who will represent the Church. If there is a matter of significant public controversy involving the Church the media will look for commentators that present divergent opinions. Conflict is at the heart of what is usually newsworthy. Media may want something “official” and for them that usually means the bishops, or at least a cleric. They will set that against other dissenting views, usually of other, high profile clergy, religious or lay commentators. These

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54 ibid, p 584.
55 ACBC Archives Minutes Meeting Bishops Committee for Media, Kensington 28 April 1995.
commentators will claim that their view is the truly authentic “Catholic” view. The usual stereotypes of a disengaged, out of touch hierarchy, unwilling to change to meet the needs of the modern world, will come to the fore. This will be set against the truly grass roots, charismatic, empowered by the Spirit, real church of the people.

As we might expect the result is often confusion, and, at worst, an undermining of the credibility of the Church to teach with authority.

Not only is there this tension between the role of the hierarchy and lay experts, another problem that must be faced is the divergent views that exist within the hierarchy. How do we manage to present a clear Catholic identity even when those who are most visibly associated with the Church, the bishops, are themselves not of one mind on a particular matter? In an article in the Pittsburgh Diocesan Catholic newspaper on 26 August 2005, Bishop Donald Wuerl (as he then was) wrote:  

> Actions taken by one bishop within a diocese can have immediate national impact and affect the bishops of the rest of the dioceses throughout the country, especially neighboring dioceses which share the same media market.

The presenting issue for these comments was the controversy about excluding certain politicians from Holy Communion.

Into this melting pot of the communications marketplace with many voices calling for recognition of what is truly Catholic we need to consider if the Episcopal Conference has a role that may assist in resolving these tensions.

To that question we now turn.

### 2. The Episcopal Conference as an expression of episcopal collegiality and a voice in the marketplace.

In most places the Episcopal Conference is not usually seen as an institution that either can or does represent a common view. What we must understand about an Episcopal Conference is that it is a bureaucratic convenience established to enable bishops, in a particular territory to work collegially. It is a mechanism that may be useful so that the message of the Church can be presented in a coherent and uniform fashion across the territory in circumstances where that it is important.

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If a bishop on the east coast gives a talk on the doctrine of the Trinity, one can be reasonably confident that a bishop on the west coast would say something similar. One or other may have greater theological expertise and be able to give an address on the subject with more, or less, expertise and theological depth. The subject matter itself, however, is unlikely to be contentious.

The issues that do cause contention are generally in the area of public policy and the application of church teaching to particular social, pastoral and political situations. In this context, the Episcopal Conference could become a mechanism for the bishops collectively to discern, first, whether or not the subject matter requires public comment, and, secondly, if it does, to discern both the content and form of the message.

The current reality is that an individual bishop, or some lay expert or commentator will be presented by the media as the authentic source for local media and what is said will be reported more or less widely depending on the nature of the issue.

Need this reality continue? Are there opportunities for the Episcopal Conference to be more proactive in presenting, preserving, and promoting the identity of the Church?

The foundational sources for dealing with the meaning of collegiality and role of Episcopal Conferences are well known. Various commentators who have written on the history of Episcopal Conferences take the meetings of the Bishops in Germany, Austria, Bavaria, Italy, and Ireland in the middle years of the 19th century as their starting point. 57

The conciliar documents *Lumen Gentium* 58 and *Christus Dominus* 59 affirmed the historical link between the local churches. Meetings on a national basis were a contemporary expression of an ancient practice in the church where bishops of a region gathered in a form of council or synod.

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58 Just as in the Gospel, the Lord so disposing, St. Peter and the other apostles constitute one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together. Indeed, the very ancient practice whereby bishops duly established in all parts of the world were in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome in a bond of unity, charity and peace, and also the councils assembled together, in which more profound issues were settled in common, the opinion of the many having been prudently considered, both of these factors are already an indication of the collegiate character and aspect of the Episcopal order; and the ecumenical councils held in the course of centuries are also manifest proof of that same character.

59 As legitimate successors of the Apostles and members of the episcopal college, bishops should realize that they are bound together and should manifest a concern for all the churches. For by divine institution and the rule of the apostolic office each one together with all the other bishops is responsible for the Church.
They addressed contemporary problems they shared, in common. They were a practical experience of, and exercise of, collegiality.

However, the theological understanding of the Episcopal Conference as an ecclesial structure, and its role in expressing and promoting episcopal collegiality, is not fully developed.

In one view: 60

It can appear paradoxical that on the one hand there is general consensus confirmed by the extraordinary synods of 1969 and 1985, popes, theologians and canonists in affirming the “pastoral usefulness” or even more the “necessity” of Episcopal Conferences for the church in the present circumstances and on the other hand there is a great disparity of opinion when it is a question of clarifying their theological status more precisely.

The apostolic letter *Apostolos Suos* noted the history of how Episcopal Conferences have developed and it identified, but did not fully resolve, issues relating to the relationship between them and the local diocesan bishops, as can be seen in the following extracts: 61

(3) Without prejudice to the power which each Bishop enjoys by divine institution in his own particular Church, the consciousness of being part of an undivided body has caused Bishops throughout the Church’s history to employ, in the fulfilment of their mission, means, structures and ways of communicating which express their communion and solicitude for all the Churches, and prolong the very life of the College of the Apostles: pastoral cooperation, consultation, mutual assistance, etc.

(5) In 1966, Pope Paul VI, by the Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, called for Episcopal Conferences to be established wherever they did not yet exist; those already existing were to draw up proper statutes; and in cases where it was not possible to establish a Conference, the Bishops in question were to join already existing Episcopal Conferences; Episcopal Conferences comprising several


nations or even international Episcopal Conferences could be established. Several years later, in 1973, the Pastoral Directory for Bishops stated once again that “the Episcopal Conference is established as a contemporary means of contributing in a varied and fruitful way to the practice of collegiality. These Conferences admirably help to foster a spirit of communion with the Universal Church and among the different local Churches. Finally, the Code of Canon Law, promulgated by me on January 25, 1983, established specific norms (Canons 447-459) regulating the objectives and the powers of Episcopal Conferences, as well as their erection, membership and functioning. The collegial spirit which inspired the establishment of Episcopal Conferences and guides their activity is also the reason why Conferences of different countries should cooperate among themselves, as the Second Vatican Council recommended and the subsequent canonical legislation reaffirmed.

(6) Following the Second Vatican Council, Episcopal Conferences have developed significantly and have become the preferred means for the Bishops of a country or a specific territory to exchange views, consult with one another and cooperate in promoting the common good of the Church: “in recent years they have become a concrete, living and efficient reality throughout the world.” Their importance is seen in the fact that they contribute effectively to unity between the Bishops, and thus to the unity of the Church, since they are a most helpful means of strengthening ecclesial communion. Even so, the growing extent of their activities has raised some questions of a theological and pastoral nature, especially with regard to their relationship to the individual Diocesan Bishops.

Practical guidance for the purpose and operation of Episcopal Conferences is found in the 2004 Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, *Apostolorum Successores* which updated the 1973 text *Ecclesiae Imago*.

The analysis of the relationships within the college of bishops has generally concentrated on the respective roles of the diocesan bishops and the supreme pastor. This is seen in *Pastores Gregis*.

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8. Objectives of the Episcopal Conference.
The role of the Episcopal Conference has grown in importance in recent years. In manifold and fruitful ways, the Conference contributes to the realization and development of the spirit of collegiality (*affectus collegialis*) among members of the same Episcopate. Through the Conference, the Bishops fulfil certain pastoral functions jointly for the faithful of their territory. Such action corresponds to the need, particularly evident today, for Bishops to provide for the common good of particular Churches through an agreed and well-coordinated policy.

56 If recourse to the principle of communion is to be made correctly and effectively, certain points of reference must always be kept in mind. Account will first have to be made of the fact that within his...
Some pose the question in terms of priority and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith used these words in describing the universal Church:

It is not the result of the communion of the Churches, but, in its essential mystery, it is a reality *ontologically and temporally* prior to every *individual*, particular Church.

The criticism by Cardinal Walter Kasper of this view is well known. Cardinal Edward Cassidy, formerly President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has proposed a solution to the dilemma of how a bishop participates in the College of Bishops while being a pastor and responding to the needs and issues of his local Church in the light of his own experience as a papal representative:

I have no doubt that the problem, and the solution, to the dilemma indicated above is to be found principally in the mentalities of those exercising authority at both levels, the local and the universal.

The issue of the relationship between bishops at the local level and the universal church is only one part of the complex reality of collegiality. What requires further study is a better understanding of how bishops relate to each other. What is yet to be resolved is how the Episcopal Conference might be able to express the *affectus collegialis*, in the concrete reality of diverse perspectives on practical issues.

The Episcopal Conference cannot replace the role of the diocesan bishop as the one who proclaims the faith of the Church, but we should ask the question whether, if well used, it may add to that role. Since the agreed role of the Episcopal Conference is to provide a forum for common action, can the local bishops use this structure for developing policies and strategies so that the means of social communications are used effectively in proclaiming the gospel and presenting the Catholic position on important public issues?

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Apostolos Suos is clear in limiting the role of the Episcopal Conference in the exercise of an authentic magisterium: 67

The very nature of the teaching office of Bishops requires that, when they exercise it jointly through the Episcopal Conference, this be done in the plenary assembly. Smaller bodies—the permanent council, a commission or other offices—do not have the authority to carry out acts of authentic magisterium either in their own name or in the name of the Conference, and not even as a task assigned to them by the Conference.

The teaching office of bishops, however, is not limited to the exercise of the authentic magisterium. Bishops teach simply by their presence and inevitably Church institutions, and the lay faithful associated with them, “teach” whenever they speak and often simply by their presence.

Father Avery Dulles SJ (as he then was) commented on the issue of the teaching role of the Episcopal Conference in the context of a broader commentary on their role: 68

I conclude, therefore, that regional bodies are needed for the effective functioning of the pastoral magisterium. This could be for an area either smaller or larger than the nation, but for the United States the national area seems generally appropriate. National organs have assumed overwhelming importance in politics, the professions, industry, and opinion making. Nearly all churches in this country have national offices. For dealing with the federal government, for ecumenical contacts and for public relations it is almost indispensable to have national agencies for the Catholic Church (emphasis added).

This paper was written in 1988 and the references to mobility of people and rapid communications take on an even greater urgency in our time. The power of the internet is such that it is simply impossible to confine comments that are made locally, about local issues, to any geographical region. While those comments are usually not acts of the authentic magisterium, they have a powerful impact on how the community will assess the Catholic identity of the institutions or organisations involved.

67 Apostolos Suos n. 23
The idea that the role of the Church in its relationship with mass media needs some form of national co-ordination did not begin with Vatican II.

*Vigilanti Cura* proposed that each country establish an office to rate films and protect morals and there is specific reference to a national office and a single centre of responsibility:⁶⁹

Therefore, it will be necessary that in each country the Bishops set up a permanent national reviewing office in order to be able to promote good motion pictures, classify the others, and bring this judgment to the knowledge of priests and faithful. It will be very proper to entrust this agency to the central organisation of Catholic Action which is dependent on the Bishops. At all events, it must be clearly laid down that this service of information, *in order to function organically and with efficiency, must be on a national basis and that it must be carried on by a single centre of responsibility* (emphasis added).

A national approach to the means of social communications would become, and remains, an important but contentious issue for the Church in Australia. A national media office for the Australian bishops was a long time coming. The story is one of uncertainty, delay, and anxiety about expense. The process exemplifies the constant tension between the roles of national and local Church structures. The main elements of that story illustrate something of the complexity of proposing that an Episcopal Conference can be a means of better presenting a consistent presence of the Church through the media.

*Inter Mirifica* reiterated the requirement of *Vigilanti Cura* for a national office but expanded beyond cinema to include all media:⁷⁰

Since an effective apostolate on a national scale calls for unity of planning and resources, this sacred Synod decrees and orders that national offices for affairs of the press, films, radio and television be established everywhere and given every aid. ......In each country the direction of such offices should be entrusted to a special committee of Bishops, or to a single Bishop. Moreover, laymen who are experts in Catholic teaching and in these arts or techniques should have a role in these offices.

In 1953 the Australian Hierarchy rejected the idea of a central bureau for broadcasting proposed in a report which has been presented by the Committee for Education.⁷¹

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⁷⁰  *Inter Mirifica* 21.

⁷¹  ACBC Archives Minutes Meetings of Hierarchy 1953 item 15.
At their meeting in April 1965 the bishops explicitly rejected a proposal by the Catholic Press Association that, “a National Catholic Press Office be established as soon as possible to implement in Australia the provision of section 21 of the Vatican Council Decree of (sic) Mass Media.” The Minutes record that “Conference gave sympathetic consideration to the proposal but regretted that it was unable to undertake such a financial burden.” On six further occasions the Conference considered a national press office but did not proceed.

In August 1971, at the same meeting as the bishops decreed that Communio et Progressio be published and “widely distributed”, a motion “that the recommendation of the Catholic Press Association for the establishment of a National Catholic Press and Information Office be accepted by Conference” was defeated but with the decision to be reviewed in January 1972.

Again, on numerous occasions through the 1970s and early 1980s the proposal was on the agenda but not considered “opportune.” Bishop Philip Kennedy, auxiliary bishop in Adelaide, was one who championed the cause but a major concern was expressed by the larger Archdioceses who did not want to “pay twice” for a national office which might be at the expense of their own diocesan communications works.

A major report on the media apostolate by Fr Paul Duffy SJ gave the idea of a national office more impetus. This comprehensive study, running to 141 pages with a detailed bibliography, surveyed all aspects of the Church’s media apostolate. The issues it raised in 1987 are still largely unresolved and few of its 16 recommendations were ever taken up seriously.

Eventually in 1989 Mary Newport was appointed as the first national media officer and she has been followed by Jackie Brady, Debra Vermeer and Beth Doherty. The Communications Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference consists of one person, with a second part-time position held by Dr Richard Leonard SJ, devoted to film and broadcasting.

Public advocacy remains a difficult issue for the Australian Bishops and there has been criticism of their effectiveness in proclaiming a clear message on many issues. One perspective on the political influence of the Catholic Church was provided by Jim Wallace, its convenor, in an article in the main Melbourne daily broadsheet, The Age:

The political influence of the Catholic Church seemed to have waned on all but ‘life’ issues, and the increasing liberalisation of parts of the Anglican and Uniting churches rendered them unwilling to oppose legislation that angered many in the

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72 ACBC Archives Minutes AEC 1965 item 27.
73 ACBC Archives Minutes AEC August 1971 items 54 & 56.
74 Fr Paul Duffy S.J. To Bring the Good News – Evangelisation and Communications, Recommendation 2
75 “Christianity is the political force”, The Age, 13 Oct 2004, p15
pews. However, all this changed at this election. The evangelical side of the church saw the mantle had fallen to them and picked it up.

A factor is the rising influence of the evangelical churches. An independent advocacy group, the Australian Christian Lobby, has been formed and is largely funded by the evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Whatever the long-term impact of evangelical churches on Australian politics, it is the view of some, at least, that, for now, they have filled an advocacy gap perceived as not being filled by other churches.

It is evident that there will be a divergence of opinion among Catholics on many issues. This is also sometimes true among bishops. However, a public consensus among bishops on key issues, in a spirit of cooperation and collegiality, can be crucial to achieving the public policy objectives of the Church.

There are two types of public policy issues for the Church: those which impact directly upon the Church’s pastoral objectives and those in which the Church has an interest. Funding for Catholic Schools, or Privacy Law impacting on hospital chaplaincy, or exemptions from anti-discrimination legislation, are examples of the first. Same sex marriage, or destructive embryo experimentation are examples of the second.

There are opportunities for the Episcopal Conference to be a forum for co-ordinated discussion on contentious issues and to avoid the public disagreement that prompted Cardinal Wuerl’s article referred to previously.

The resolution of the tension between local diocesan autonomy and a centralised co-ordinated perspective is within the power of the bishops to achieve. They simply need to reach agreement. The institutionalisation of the episcopacy is not a fundamental matter of faith and bishops are free to re-structure how they operate so that the Episcopal ministry is more authentically aligned to the essential nature of the apostolic college.

Dr. Lennan presents the theological proposition in these terms:  

We might argue that both the evidence of Scripture and the Church’s consistent practice mean that the episcopacy must be regarded as a constitutive element of the Church. What this does not mean however, is that all aspects of the episcopal ministry, such as the manner of appointment of bishops, their titles, or the relationship between bishops and other members of the Church can claim the status of *ius divinum*, particularly if they have become inappropriate in the

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contemporary context. Any reluctance to accept challenges to the panoply of the Church’s institutional life, must itself be challenged by the reminder, that because the church will never exhaust God’s self-revelation in Christ, faithfulness to the Gospel presumes not only the willingness to hold firm to what is essential but also the willingness to free ourselves from those attitudes and practices which the community no longer recognise as vehicles of the spirit.

Cardinal Wuerl sets the scene for his approach to how the practical issue might be resolved by referring to the practical application of the foundational principles: 77

An examination of the exercise within the episcopal conference of the affectus collegialis, or collegial spirit, may demonstrate how the bishops of a region may pastorally assist the faithful of their territory who are affected by a particular issue that by necessity requires a pastoral response due to its nature.

The conciliar document Christus Dominus asserts the establishment of Episcopal Conferences as a fruitful result of the cooperation of bishops of a given territory who share “insights of prudence and experience” from which “there will emerge a holy union of energies in the service of the common good of the churches” (Christus Dominus, 37).

He proposes two solutions: 78

This brings us to a consideration of two possibilities for the conference of bishops in attempting to find a practical pastoral manner to express the collegial spirit that is to be a hallmark of episcopal pastoral ministry. One such approach would be an actual mechanism of the conference to facilitate some consensus and unified pastoral practice. Another approach which would be less formal but perhaps more effective would be the commitment on the part of all the bishops to discuss beforehand, through some conference structure, decisions that will impact all of the bishops and the church as a whole.

While either solution may be appropriate for fundamental policy decisions, such as the position on Holy Communion for dissident politicians, neither is likely to work in practice with respect to media policy.

Managing media responses to major matters of public discussion at a national level is important but difficult. When there are multiple voices acting without co-ordination the message is diluted, personalities are played against each other, and the public is left confused. The fundamental

77 Wuerl op cit p 214.
78 Wuerl op cit p 216
principle of effective public communication, especially for public policy advocacy, is one clear message.

The speedy time frame for media comment requires a permanent structural solution to determine who will speak, when that person will speak and what might be said.

The following is an indicative, not an exhaustive list of possible presenters and the situations in which they might be used to publicly present a Church position: 79

1) President of ACBC - for major/national issues (e.g. a Vatican document being released or a formal Conference statement or policy position).

2) Chairman of Bishops Commissions – major issues (e.g. school funding or industrial relations reform, launch of policy document/report).

3) Archbishops – major issues within the States (e.g. State legislation on moral issues) and on national issues in response to the media outlets within their own cities using a template prepared and agreed nationally.

4) Individual Bishops – local issues (e.g. child abuse allegation, or reorganisation of parishes); reinforcing national policy to their local media; explanation of matters of faith. They provide the “local angle” that give some newsworthiness to a more general issue.

5) Expert Bishops – on issues requiring detailed knowledge/expertise (e.g. welfare policy, bioethics, indigenous issues, education funding).

6) Generic Bishops – bishops with particular skills in media, or a relationship with media (e.g. following up on a Vatican document or general Church teaching on issues).

7) Specialised Episcopal Conference Staff – senior staff with a particular and defined competence (e.g. National Director of Caritas on an overseas development funding issue, or the CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia on charity law reform).

8) Lay expert – expert to handle particular issues within area of expertise or responsibility (e.g. chairman or executive officer of National Catholic Education

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79 This model takes for its context the experience and situation of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC).
Commission, Catholic Social Services Australia, Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations, Catholic Health Australia, Catholic Social Justice Council, Catholic Earthcare Australia, Caritas Australia). There may be times when this is done for the purpose of enhancing the individual’s profile to promote private access to decision makers.

9) **ACBC Secretariat** – releasing prepared statement endorsed by the President or a Commission Chairman. ACBC staff also have a role in researching and privately advocating issues, in conjunction with, and where possible to reinforce, public statements or more overt activity by others.

10) **Local Diocesan Spokesperson (clerical or lay)** – as appropriate for local issues and again to reinforce locally the position of a national spokesperson.

It is not the role of Episcopal Conference staff to substitute for the bishops, either as policy makers or spokespersons. When the Conference President, an individual bishop, or lay expert is delegated by the Episcopal Conference to present a public message this must be crafted to make it clear that this is a Church message and not the private view of the individual.

Episcopal solidarity is critical to an effective media strategy. In practice this means that the designated spokespersons on the various issues are known in advance, and in a spirit of collegiality the policy position is agreed, and their judgment as to what to say, when and how to say it, is respected.

Their effectiveness is significantly undermined if the media source multiple voices and rendered ineffective if there is public contradiction. Diocesan staff and agencies should be kept informed by their bishop of any national strategy and refer requests for comment to the nominated spokesperson. The Conference Communications Officer can be a source of information as to the strategy being adopted and act in a co-ordinating role. Co-ordination rather than control has to be the focus of any national communications office.

In the modern media world, a comment “within one’s own diocese” cannot be confined to that territory. Comments on one’s diocesan newspaper can often be a good source for the national press, especially if they are “controversial.” It would be contrary to the spirit of collegiality for an individual bishop, whose views are not generally accepted by his brother bishops, to justify his own statement by purporting to confine it to his own diocese.

The disparate nature of the media, the need for a local angle, and lack of discipline within the Church itself, inevitably means that any attempt at centralised control is inadvisable and unworkable. It is naive to presume that the President of the Episcopal Conference will be the
natural spokesperson for the Church in a particular territory. He may be less well known to the media than other bishops with high public profile. He is elected for a term and may well only develop a good media profile just before his term ends. He may or may not have that “charisma” that media outlets identify as “good talent.”

The resolution of the problem of who speaks requires agreement by the bishops on a protocol which could take the form of identifying categories of spokespeople for particular situations.

The resolution of what is said requires agreement on the broad elements of the policy position. It is this exercise that is most properly within the competence of the Episcopal Conference. It can provide the necessary research and material for the bishops to thoroughly discuss an issue in order to resolve differences and determine a public position. It will be an exercise of the affectus collegialis, for an individual bishop to accept that others propose a different view to his own and to remain silent on that issue in the public forum for the good of the whole Church. Where it is clear that there is no general consensus, this may well indicate that this is a matter where the entire episcopate remains silent and acknowledges that on this particular matter there is no “Catholic” position.

By way of conclusion the Episcopal Conference is less a player in its own right in the media marketplace than the facilitator of research and information gathering to properly equip those who the bishops of a territory give the task of being the public face of the Church.
Can Election-Campaign Technology Inspire Churches To Be More Interactive?

By Frances Forde Plude

In the Obama hi-tech presidential campaigns, there was widespread involvement and ownership, especially by youth. That was an election campaign empowered by newer communication technologies. And there have been even more recent global power shifts due to global and local networks.

Now, focusing especially on global interactive, dialogic, cultural movements, we can ask:

1. How should churches respond to the widespread desire for participatory involvement and expression, especially among young people?

2. How do interactive communication technologies facilitate this participation for all people of faith?

Here we will explore, first, some principles from two prominent Roman Catholic theologians. Then we will refer to the author’s writings and experiences. And, finally, we will refer to an important study by Ineke de Feijter, a European scholar and pastor, who has analyzed many social communication documents of various Christian church bodies.

A practical accountability test will be to see if the theories expressed by theologians, scholars, and church documents are, in fact, being implemented by religious institutions. Perhaps there are practical on-the-ground lessons contained within the Obama campaign and other election models. Our primary case study will be focused on the Roman Catholic Church since that is the denomination most familiar to me. In the 1960s Pope John XXIII convened a global council of bishops to review the Catholic Church viewpoints. Theologians accompanied these bishops so there was a fresh analysis of “the signs of the times.” This consultation is known as Vatican II.

Hermann Pottmeyer is one of the Catholic Church’s leading theologians. In the past, Pottmeyer reviewed dialogue as a model for communication and community in the Catholic Church. (Granfield, 1994, 97). He noted this word “dialogue” was new as a description of communication within the Church. Before the Second Vatican Council the terms used were “jurisdiction” and “obedience” when speaking of internal communication flows in the Catholic Church. Referring to the idea that the Church is a community in which all members have joint responsibility, Pottmeyer noted the early Church accepted the secular Roman legal maxim: “What concerns all must be discussed and approved by all.” Quoting a Vatican II document, Pottmeyer notes: “… in order for the Church to show itself ‘the sign of [community] which allows honest dialogue’
among all human beings, it will be necessary ‘to foster within the Church itself … dialogue with … abounding fruitfulness’ (Gaudium et spes, 92).

Another leading Catholic theologian, Ladislas Örsy, studied civil law at Oxford and is a scholar of church law. Örsy has published an analysis of how faithfully the Catholic Church has instituted legal structures to implement (or not!) the Vatican II documented statements, including the above goal of ‘honest dialogue’ (Orsy, 2009).

Örsy applauds the “energy” of the Vatican II discussions and final documents. He concludes perhaps the apparent chaos in the Church since the Council is, in fact, a continuation of this energy as the Catholic community faces the challenges of integrating centuries-old traditions with contemporary-world realities. Örsy uses the term “reception” to refer to the dynamic process of receiving or accepting doctrines and laws promulgated by the Church. In a global talkback or interactive communication culture, there is almost inevitably some ‘static’ introduced into this reception. Örsy further notes there is a serious lack of consultation embedded in the new Code of Church Law circulated after the Council. Non-ordained persons are not allowed active involvement in the construction of church law. Thus, Örsy claims, “unlike civil communities, we have no means built into the system for the renewal of our laws.” He later notes this closes out a lot of creativity, for truly creative individuals will not be attracted to such a closed legal task.

I have been studying interactive communications for almost three decades (Plude, 1981, 1994, 1996, 2001, 2005, 2007), with special reference to the need for dialogue both within the Catholic Church and in terms of the Church’s interaction with global cultures and communication flows. I proposed a model of cooperative interaction in my Harvard doctoral dissertation, under the direction of the MIT scholar Ithiel de Sola Pool (Plude, 1981). I later developed an extensive model or “map” of the development of interactive communication that ranges from the feudal society of oral traditions and monastery scriptoria to today’s world of wireless technology and on-the-spot digital networks (Plude, 2007). Using four grids (see Appendix), this model shows parallel tracks between cultural contexts, media formats and structures of social and religious thought. Reviewing the links shows that the increasing diversity of media channels – especially those media formats that allow ‘talk-back’ – seems to facilitate a number of things: decentralization; economic, political, and religious liberation; and the decline of hierarchical authority structures, for example.

I conclude: “As talk-back forums and technologies develop, it becomes more difficult to control the communication content of inter- and intra-group exchanges. Liberation movements emerge and become stronger, fueled by “people-on-the-streets” power – people who are connected instantly by cell phones and Internet social media. All this represents a huge challenge for centralized, hierarchical religious institutions. However, people in communities of faith just keep on interacting!
In her own research, Ineke de Feijter harks back to dialogue related to genuine community as articulated by Buber (de Feijter, 2007). She suggests this “as a point of departure with respect to (religious) communication. It means another person is respected as a subject, in his or her own right, and is not to be made into an object, as a ‘target’ of communication.” She also notes communication rights cannot be exercised without the existence of a public sphere as one of the pillars of democracy. She later refers to four key principles of communication rights: *freedom, inclusiveness, diversity, and participation* (271). deFeijter states: “A worldwide, genuine communication society, at all levels, cannot be reached without a broad, society-wide conversation about what future we actually want. … Churches have an important contribution to make in this respect” (322).

After reviewing many church policy statements on their communication goals ((from a variety of denominations), de Feijter notes: “The one-way model of communication and the instrumental view of media are under pressure; however, they prevail in the majority of church documents studied here… Definitions about interactivity are not elaborated nor is [interactivity] analyzed for its implications for the church and its communication” (257-8). In her extensive analysis of church communication documents, Ineke de Feijter presents a valuable and rich perspective. This scholar and practitioner calls attention to the potential for churches to take the lead in personal communication, democratization and empowerment, public presence and participation, grassroots communication - and as a space for dialogue. And she respectfully critiques where they fall short in this role.

Some general recommendations could be added here:

- There should be an *honest* respect for dialogue within, and between, churches; just having a Facebook page does not mean authentic acceptance of feedback.
- Respectful theological interaction should occur between various *cultures*.
- Humans, globally, represent a variety of stories. Churches need to respect these individual stories as they proclaim Gospel stories.

The theologian Bernard Häring reflects upon the Ethics of Communication and notes: “A *teaching* Church that is not, above all, a *learning, listening* Church, is not on the wave-length of divine communication.” (*Free and Faithful in Christ*, 155, emphasis added)).


Appendix

Figure 1

**Centralized Periods**
Conducted by Frances Forde Pluke

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• feudal society</td>
<td>• oral traditions</td>
<td>• Catholic Church’s association with medieval culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• monarchy</td>
<td>• art in culture</td>
<td>• monasticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Crusades</td>
<td>• monastery scriptoria</td>
<td>• cathedrals dominate village squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reformation</td>
<td>• printing</td>
<td>• Thomism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• rise of Middle Class</td>
<td>• books become a commodity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• enlightment</td>
<td>• newspapers in Europe by 1607</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reformation</td>
<td>• printing</td>
<td>• Catholic Church’s unified/central authority threatened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• rise of Middle Class</td>
<td>• books become a commodity</td>
<td>• other sectors experience their voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• schools emerge</td>
<td>• newspapers in Europe by 1607</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Industrial Revolution</td>
<td>• letters of correspondence</td>
<td>• a secular society, philosophy and science assault religious authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• steam engines encourage travel</td>
<td>• posts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• bureaucracies increase</td>
<td>• telegraph and telephone</td>
<td>• Catholic Church social theory supports workers after many years of labor strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• much centralized economic and political power</td>
<td>• elevators, skyscrapers, telephones encourage organizational structures</td>
<td>• churches increase their own bureaucratic structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• banks/financial systems</td>
<td>• mass media grow/concentrate</td>
<td>• Pius IX <em>Syllabus of Errors</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• colonial empires</td>
<td>• newspapers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• nation-states clash in two global wars</td>
<td>• magazines for large audiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• radio</td>
<td>• large television networks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cinema</td>
<td>• church publishing grows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• TV and radio ministries</td>
<td>• centralized unified voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• large audiences stressed</td>
<td>• large audiences stressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2: Development of Interactive Communication Systems

Decentralized Phases (1960s To Date)
Constructed by Frances Forde Plude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• liberation movements</td>
<td>• group media</td>
<td>• Vatican II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o social structures under siege</td>
<td>o structures for group support</td>
<td>• “people of God” view emerges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o feminism</td>
<td>▪ base communities</td>
<td>• emphasis on local church/vernacular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o civil rights</td>
<td>▪ telephone support groups (A.A., bereavement support, women’s groups)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o gay rights</td>
<td></td>
<td>• development of national bishop conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o sexual revolution</td>
<td></td>
<td>• increasing laity roles defined but not implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o ecology/green revolution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o growth of choice/options</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cybernetics/systems theory</td>
<td>• mass media threatened by cable/VCRs/individual satellite feeds</td>
<td>• large numbers of clergy, religious leave vowed congregations and dioceses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o new social management tools</td>
<td>• national newspapers and magazines cut back; specialized journals and local press expand</td>
<td>• co-responsibility concept develops with parish/diocesan councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o new decision-making styles</td>
<td>• newsletters multiply with electronic publishing and email</td>
<td>• theologians argue against excessive central control by Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pyramid management</td>
<td></td>
<td>• central authority of Roman Catholic church feels under siege again (like at the Reformation) and gets defensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structures/hierarchies are under pressure in social institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• political/social organizations threatened, somewhat paralyzed, by “tyranny of many small minorities”</td>
<td>• computers merge with communication</td>
<td>• liberation theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• corporations decentralize</td>
<td>o people interconnected horizontally (like telephones earlier)</td>
<td>• charismatic movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Soviet Union begins to break apart</td>
<td>• media/information overload assaults individual and institutional effectiveness</td>
<td>• polarization within churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Vatican II impetus slows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• few people enter religious orders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• laity frustrated by limited voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• celibacy for priests is questioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• women’s ordination movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• growing number of Christians in Asia, Africa, Latin America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 3: Development of Interactive Communication Systems

**Growth of Dialogic Theory and Structures**  
**Constructed by Frances Forde Plude**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • increasing numbers of global mechanisms / cooperation / treaties to solve global issues (ecology, famine, fishing, trade tariffs)  
• European Union and other regional consortia formed  
• collaborative legal structures struggle to get born (space law, international technical standardization)  
• glasnost/end of Cold War  
• Eastern European democracies struggle politically/economically  
• increasing use of U.N  
• emergence of term “World Order”  
• Berlin wall falls and unites Germany | • increasing use of intra-group media/messaging  
  o answering machines  
  o computers  
  o fax  
  o email  
  o mobile radio/phones  
  o paging systems  
  o teleconferencing  
• need to coordinate media due to overload of information sources and content  
• convergence of media  
• concentration/cross-ownership of media companies  
• digital technology begins to replace analog modes | • increasing strength of local and ethnic theologies  
  o national bishop conferences  
  o priest-personnel senates  
  o women asserting themselves; vowed religious congregations restructure  
• language pressured to move beyond gender  
• liturgical varieties  
• growing awareness that prayer (contemplative, charismatic) is widely practiced among laity, not just professed religious  
• collectives of theologians organize joint statements |
| • wars emerge from lack of negotiation and unified world order mechanisms  
• a struggle to be truly collaborative among nations  
• strong nation-state presence (U.S./U.K./Europe, etc.) remains  
• UN role shows need for more formal, institutionalized collaborative mechanisms | • global attempts to establish communication links  
  o domain addresses encourage internet use  
  o copyright protection of intellectual property becomes a concern  
  o privacy issues emerge | • growing attention to global poverty and justice issues  
• voice of the churches somewhat muted due to their own strife  
• churches called upon to move beyond internal divisions to offer the world a moral, spiritual collaborative vision |
Figure 4: Development of Interactive Communication Systems

A Postmodern View
Constructed by Frances Forde Plude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Structures</th>
<th>Media Formats</th>
<th>Structures of Social/Religious Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• increasing globalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• increasing ethnic clashes with national boundaries and nearby states</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• growing numbers of immigrants and refugees flowing over borders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• sociologists identify the reality of ‘the project of the self’: autonomous and reflexive</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• continuing breakdown of large network audiences within U.S. and other countries</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o cable diversification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o global satellite broadcasts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o VCR transmission systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• news broadcasts become more interactive and argumentative</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• increasing popularity of talk-back</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• cell phone used for audio/video</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• computer miniaturization/growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>• blogs, websites like MySpace project self-narratives</td>
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<tr>
<td>• world-wide AIDS epidemic</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• negotiation theorists and practitioners attempt to resolve difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• growing use of peacekeeping forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>• increasing global terrorism and attack on U.S. World Trade Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>• growing use of U.S. unilateral power (Iraq, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Middle East war erupts with increased use of suicide bombers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• increased outsourcing of labor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• climate change awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>• WWW and internet use developed cyberspace network world with increased use of motion video</td>
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<td>• changes occur in personal communication habits</td>
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<td>• system-wide communication in corporations and politics changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• wireless technology allows on-the-spot dialogic networks</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• music videos and video disks make entertainment product more mobile</td>
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<td>• CDs, DVDs and iPods permit video and audio downloading and piracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Al Jazeera news network gives a systematic voice to the Arab world</td>
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<td>• established religious groups struggle to adapt to rapid technology change, growing liberation movements and a culture of talking back</td>
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<tr>
<td>• media-literacy movement (in schools and churches) contributes to media awareness and some media-bashing</td>
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<tr>
<td>• global attention to sex- and cover-up scandals within Catholic Church; leadership crisis emerges</td>
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<td>• gradual awareness of ‘a generation of seekers’ (after spirituality)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• churches and media researchers become aware that audience reception is key; it is individualized and sometimes rebellious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pluralism and ambiguity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• hermeneutics voices issue of cultural interpretation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• communication is re-defined by some as cultural mediation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• growing visibility of fundamentalist movements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• tensions rise as growth of Christianity and Islam explodes in Africa, Asia, Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VII. Communicative Theology
Communicative Theology: A Brief Introduction

By Frances Forde Plude

Almost 40 years ago, a small Jesuit-sponsored conference outside of Rome asked the question: What kinds of basic questions for theology should communication address? Today, in a global digital media culture, that question is painfully urgent for all churches.

Listed here is a trail of Communication/Theology happenings; conferences are all detailed in Part 5 of this volume.

- From 1984-1997 eight conferences followed the one mentioned above. The topics were all related to communication: moral theology; ecclesiology; and communication in the U.S. Church, and many more.

- For a decade (1993-2003), an annual seminar was held at the convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) to allow theologians and communication specialists to dialogue.

- European Catholic funding supported a small, ecumenical and International Commission on Media, Religion and Culture. This group met annually for a decade in many nations for discussions between religious thinkers and communication specialists. A parallel series of global conferences have reached other academics.

- The Vatican, U.S. bishops, and other groups, have sponsored annual THEOCOM conferences on Communication and Theology at Santa Clara University in California. This brings a small international group of theology and communication specialists together.

- I have created a Communication and Theology Resource Kit – a bibliographic “paper trail” of key writings by those involved in thinking-through the communication/theology interface. The document is over 100 pages in length! (See Book 5 on this site).

And yet…

The above study/discussion has not reached people in the pews. Work in Communicative Theology in Europe seems to bridge the theoretical and practical in creative ways. Several individuals have led this movement.
Matthias Scharer serves as professor emeritus of practical theology in the fields of catechetics and religious education, University of Innsbruck. Bernd Jochen Hilberath has been professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Tübingen. Working with them has been Brad Hinze, Fordham, and Mary Ann Hinsdale, Boston College – both leading U.S. theologians.

Conferences organized by this CommunionTIVE Theology group attract hundreds of catechetical leaders and clergy in Europe. This “model” seems to reach people on the ground although it is based on much research. As Hinze notes: [This project is] “experimenting with, and reflecting on, group processes that promote personal and collective discernment and decision-making in the church... they have developed a theologically integrated approach to group communicative practices.”

The theological work of Scharer and Hilberath represents pedagogy, group process and adult faith formation influenced by Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI), developed by Ruth C. Cohn. This is her model.

**Vocabulary/Models of Communicative Theology & Theme Centered Interaction**

**(Ruth Cohn’s Model)**  
*(Scharer/Hilberath Communicative Theology)*

*I* = Individuals with their life and faith history  
*We* = People in groups/communities, & inter-communication  
*It (content)* = The faith tradition  
*Globe* = The global reality of society and church

*Image: The first three are a triangle, enclosed in a circle (Globe)*

In 2008, at Fordham University, the above team hosted a conference exploring intercultural communication and Communicative Theology. I believe that such workshops, duplicated widely, could reach people in the pews.
Communicative Theology

By Matthias Scharer

Matthias Scharer has served as a professor of practical theology in the fields of catechetics and religious education in the University of Innsbruck. There he headed a research team working on communicative theology and the work of theme-centered interaction (TCI) developed by Ruth Cohen. He has lectured widely in Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia on this process and has conducted seminars employing this method.

Definition

Communicative Theology is primarily situated in a specific “culture of practicing theology,” where the Christian understanding of God, mankind, and the world is critically connected to the methods of Ruth Cohn’s theme centered interaction (TCI) and where communication is given the role of an intermediary between the two systems. Communication in TCI is thus extended to include the free and unavailable self-communication of God. “Communicative Theology consists of theology derived from living communication processes” (Scharer & Hilberath, 2003, p. 15). Thus, it goes far beyond just applying the principles of TCI according to Ruth Cohn in a theological setting.

Origin

Communicative Theology developed from work being done with TCI in various types of groups using various approaches to the practice and theory of theology. B. J. Hilberath, a systematic theologian, and M. Scharer, a practicing theologian and a teacher of TCI, were invited by K. Ludwig in the 1990s to develop theologically oriented TCI curricula at the Theological-Pastoral Institute (TPI) in Mainz. Many TCI teachers subsequently took part in these activities. These efforts to map TCI onto theological subjects were linked to earlier attempts to adapt TCI according to Ruth Cohn for the theological training and education as well as for church pastoral work and religious education.

The first proponents of what eventually (around the year 2000) came to be called “Communicative Theology” were well aware of the gap that exists between academic theology and the concrete needs of practicing pastors and priests as well as their congregations. They were also acquainted with the problem that church structures and church work methods are generally oriented more toward external criteria than pure academic theology.

Against this background, it became clear that “Communicative Theology” somehow had to be grounded in what was happening in both theological research and educational settings. Some
theology faculties were already working with TCI methods in their seminars, so the introduction of Communicative Theology fell on fertile ground. Further impetus for the systematic implementation of TCI in theology was provided by the concept of the university course on Communicative Theology offered at the University of Innsbruck, which, beginning in 2001, provided both bachelor and masters students with 5 semesters of instruction in this subject. This program still exists today. An interdisciplinary and internationally oriented research circle “Communicative Theology” was established in 2003 and meets regularly at symposiums and congresses around the world. Its efforts are supported by research projects and publications.

Explanations

The ideological orientations specific to TCI and Communicative Theology, respectively, do not necessarily contradict each other, in as much as God’s communication with humans is considered a concrete part of this relationship. Such an approach attributes a very humanistic touch to human communication that is based on the life and fate of a concrete human being, Jesus of Nazareth. The gift of the Holy Spirit in every human soul as the subject of a relationship with other human beings and with God is the expression of this. An example may be found in the ongoing analysis of dioceses and other church organizations by management consultants as well as the development plans put forth by the dioceses which (independently) contain a number of implications for theological work and structural and personnel decisions.

In the communication of God’s love for mankind, the spirit of Jesus provides humans with relationships and prohibits any exclusion of individuals or whole groups. This corresponds to the basic intention of TCI as well. Both approaches to communication, that of TCI and that of Communicative Theology, do not mesh well with the modern social mainstream, which generally sees communication from a more technological and efficiency-oriented vantage point. Thus, in this respect TCI and Communicative Theology share a deeply humanistic approach to life itself (→ Axioms) as well as in the way they strive to prevent violence from occurring in human relationships. From a communicative and theological point of view, this common concern for human connection through relationships may be traced back to the mystery of the Trinity of God, which puts God in a relationship to Himself and has God connecting to others by choice. A further common meeting point between theology and TCI lies in their respective conviction that → “living learning” is diametrically opposed to “dead learning.”

The life-oriented approach of TCI may certainly be employed in educational processes to look at the questions of living and dead learning as part of the basic theological inquiry into the meaning of life and the salvation of humankind. Communicative Theology differentiates between three levels present in the theological process, all of which are seen as producing theological truths and thus continually interlocking.
Communicative Theology combines the

- direct level of participation,
- experiential and interpretive level,
- the scientific, reflective level.

True theological insights emerge only when these three levels are linked to one another, which in turn allows all humans to participate in theological processes by introducing their own specific experiences – inasmuch as they have committed to dealing with the basic existential questions involved in theology (whether explicitly or implicitly). TCI affects Communicative Theology not just in its efforts regarding theology, but also encourages finding, (re)discovering, and (re)defining its own specific places of knowledge (*loci theologici*) in biographical, interactional, traditional, and context-specific ways. This means adapting the four factors of the TCI model (→ Four-Factor Model) – “I,” “We,” “It,” and “Globe” – to the central theological loci, much as R. Siebenrock did with the most important theological premises (cf. Hünermann, 2003, pp. 207–251; Seckler, 1988, pp. 79–104). A combination of the TCI factors with the traditional insights stemming from the *loci theologici* results in four dimensions decisive to the hermeneutics of Communicative Theology:

- the dimension of personal life and experiences of faith,
- the dimension of social experiences and church attachment,
- the dimension of Biblical evidence and their living mediation as well as other religious traditions, and
- the dimension of the social context and worldly wisdom.

If we combine the various dimensions and levels of Communicative Theology, we achieve a critical-conflictual dynamic that is theologically relevant. Figure 1 summarizes the patterns of thought and action inherent to Communicative Theology. All three levels of communicative theologizing should be considered simultaneously.

Figure 1. The patterns of thought and action inherent to Communicative Theology.

**Endnotes**


2 The term “Communicative Theology” goes back to an idea offered by J. Panhofer, who suggested this terminology while putting together a university curriculum for a theological faculty.
3 On the other hand, academic theology also suffers from the poor relationship it maintains to practical theological applications. The very broad collection of disciplines present in modern theology point, on the one hand, toward the high scientific standards it has reached; on the other hand, they also effectively limit the meaning and effectiveness academic theology can have in practical matters.

3 An example may be found in the ongoing analysis of dioceses and other church organizations by management consultants as well as the development plans put forth by the dioceses which (independently) contain a number of implications for theological work and structural and personnel decisions.

4 The connection between the development of a curriculum of Communicative Theology in the Faculty for Theology at the University of Tübingen occurred because of the work of B. J. Hilberath, who together with M. Scharer held an introductory week of seminars directed toward the teaching staff of this university course.

5 See, for example, the project supported by the Foundation for the Support of Scientific Research in Austria (FWF) entitled “Less Violence Due to Increased Encounters? A Critical Look at the Social Relevance of Theme-Centered Interaction According to Ruth C. Cohn (TCI) with Respect to Coping with Conflicts.” Furthermore, a number of suggestions were made to include TCI in the doctorate school of the University of Innsbruck as part of the interfaculty research projects entitled “World Order – Religion – Violence.”


7 R. Siebenrock is Professor for Systematic Theology in the Theology Faculty of the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

8 The small triangles within the sphere at the respective corners (or in the spaces) mark the context and show that each of the four dimensions always contains the other dimensions. All three levels of communicative theologizing should be considered simultaneously.
Communicative Theology: A Short Introduction

By Bernd Jochen Hilberath

[Professor Hilberath is Emeritus Professor at Tübingen University. This paper was presented at the first THEOCOM conference, Santa Clara University, California.]

Communicative Theology as Contextual

Communicative theology is not a theory of communication. Admittedly, communicative theology is intimately concerned with communication — especially with the processes of living communication. By the same token, however, Communicative Theology is not a theological reflection about any single sector of reality, comparable to a “theology of marriage” or a “theology of work.” On the contrary, it addresses itself to the whole of reality — a trait it shares with the Theology of Liberation, which likewise deals with reality as a whole, namely in the perspective of God, who liberates his People. This is the constant notion of God, which has prevailed since the Exodus, but the concrete experience of this vision of God has not been equally present in all periods of history. For this reason, the task of the Theology of Liberation was to restore an awareness of this vision in a particular context. Thus, Liberation Theology is a contextual theology that attends to the “signs of the times.”

Analogously, Communicative Theology has its foundation in God’s self-communication, in short, in the revelation of a “communicative God.” This too holds for all times and places, but the contemporary situation in the Catholic Church and in the ecumenical movement calls for special attention in this regard, and this is the context in which Communicative Theology was born. It did not arise as an abstract theory developed on the planning table and subsequently applied in practice. Quite the contrary! It arose precisely out of the practice of theological communication within groups, in particular in groups that had come together for advanced theological training on various levels, among them being training courses and a degree program in Communicative Theology at Innsbruck University, as well as programs for pastoral leaders and religious educators that were a weeklong or conducted over an extended period of time.

The beginnings of Communicative Theology go back to my cooperation with Prof. Matthias Scharer of Innsbruck University. Subsequently, Mary Ann Hinsdale of Boston College and Bradford Hinze of Fordham University also became involved. The research group, which now includes professors, graduate, and post-graduate students, including clergy and lay ecclesial ministers, and theologians who are involved in pastoral practice, meets once a year to exchange ideas. In addition, regular academic seminars are held for doctoral candidates at Innsbruck University and Tübingen University.
Living Communication in Process

Matthias Scharer and I joined with the aim of providing guidance and support — not from without, but rather from within — to “processes of living learning”, in which we ourselves were participating as leaders and experts. Thus, our engagement followed three basic convictions:

1. in theology, content, and method (understood here as a way of knowing and thinking about the content), cannot be separated from each other
2. in theology, teaching and learning are only possible as a process
3. in this process, all the participants must be taken seriously as acting subjects of theological communication

On the first point, theological notions, even when they have taken fixed form in the Bible and in the witnesses of Tradition, are essentially only snapshot views of the path of faith. Thus, theological statements are not mere formulae to be learned by heart and passed on to others according to the motto “how do I tell it to my children?” To be understood in any real sense, the “meaning” of such statements must be theologically “reflected”, that is to say it must be mirrored, so to speak, in one’s own biography, in the biographical stories of other people, in the experiences of groups (ranging from the small group engaged in a communicative theology seminar to the all-encompassing “WE” of the church as a whole), and ultimately, it must be “reflected” in response to the challenges presented by “the globe” both in terms of the realities of human beings and the environment in local situations around the world.

Our second conviction, the process character of theological teaching and learning, can be made clearer using a German play of words: theology is “Nach-Denken” — in the sense of “thinking in the wake of something which sets the course” — and “Nach-Gehen” — in the sense of “going along the path of something which has set the course.” The course to be taken by this Nach-Denken and Nach-Gehen has been set by the Tradition, and the goal of such Nach-Denken and Nach-Gehen is to discover or correct one’s own way of living the faith and thus to make progress in the life of faith.

Clearly, the theological “content” of this process is not something to be discovered for the first time; what is “discovered”, namely the belief in the triune God, has long been present as something both knowable and known. But it becomes my own object of faith only when I consciously go forward along the path to which it points, namely when I relate it to my own reality and to my perception of reality as a whole. Thus, the project of our first jointly-led course in Communicative Theology was given the title, not simply “The Triune God”, but rather “In the beginning was relationship — our Communication of Faith with the Triune God.”
On the third point, we make no claim to have discovered the wheel of theology anew. On the contrary, we only practice what has always been the task of theology, namely the kind of “thinking in the wake of” and “going along the path of” mentioned above: these have always been constitutive for the reflection and development of the life of faith in all of its diverse paths and ways of expression. Instead, what we have done is to reflect consciously and methodically on the process involved in such theological activity as we have ourselves experienced it. Here too, the principle holds: In the beginning is relationship, namely the communicative relationships within a group.

Precisely in the present situation in the church and in the ecumenical movement, there is need to give closer attention to the “instinct of faith of the whole People of God.” If the church and ecumenism is to have a future, it is not enough for church leaders and theologians to listen to each other; in addition, the whole People of God must become involved in the communication of faith. All churches agree that in every baptized person the Holy Spirit awakens a sensus fidei, i.e. an instinct of faith. In our own time, the concrete development of this instinct of faith has more and more become the responsibility of individual Christians. Thus, more and more, forms of shared community along the path of faith become necessary, in order that, from the individual believers’ instinct of faith, a collective instinct of the faithful can emerge. This sensus fidelium grows out of the sensus fidei of individual believers, but it also supports the individual sensus fidei. Thus, in the communication of the faith, a consensus in fundamental convictions should be sought after, so a true “con-sensus fidelium” emerges.

What is Specific to Communicative Theology?

By no means do we assume, in our work, that communication in faith always succeeds or that it will always arrive at consensus. Analogously to the way Liberation Theology arose because human beings and indigenous peoples were being oppressed, the concept of Communicative Theology arose in a context that, although admittedly far less dramatic, was nonetheless existentially relevant for the survival of the faith, namely in the context of a practice marked by enormous communication deficits, indeed by failures of communication.

On the meta-level of theory, two ideas mutually complemented and cross-fertilized each other here. On the one hand, the notion of theme centered interaction, (TCI), according to Ruth C. Cohn, which Matthias Scharer brought into play, and, on the other hand, the version of Communio Ecclesiology that I and my colleagues in Tübingen had been attempting to elaborate. Communio and communicatio thus outline the understanding of “communication in the everyday life of faith”, which, by working together, we began to develop at first implicitly and then more and more explicitly.
Human communication does not need a theological, i.e. Trinitarian, basis to be practiced in a human way. But precisely the fact that the triune God appears here to be so “un-necessary” and indeed “superfluous” for ordinary communication, makes his importance for theological communicatio and communio conspicuous. According to biblical witnesses, God repeatedly showed himself to be a God who is able and willing to enter into relationship. At the same time, it becomes equally clear, that God does not need human beings to be God. Already within himself, by his very nature and personhood, he is rich in relationship.

In the beginning was relationship! It is in word and deed that God’s revelation takes place. Christians believe that God, in himself, not only has a word, but (also) is this Word, and we believe this Word, the logos of the theos, became human, not simply in the sense of an “as if”, but really, that is, in the flesh. Thus, God’s relationship to humankind is, from the beginning, communicative — by its very nature as logos. The 2nd Vatican Council recalled this to mind once again — this is another example of contextual theology! — when, in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (No. 2), it stated: “Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God, out of the abundance of His love, speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.”

Human beings can communicate without believing. There is no need to base theories of communication on theology, but there is a need to ask about the consequences of believing in a God, who in himself is relationship and communication: what does this mean for our understanding of ourselves and of our communication within our communities? Admittedly, Communicative Theology is not alone in needing to attend to the relevance of such an understanding of God for our understanding of the nature of being human and living in human societies (including the Church)! This is an imperative for all forms of theology. In fact, all people of faith are convinced that their belief in a God, who is open to relationship and communication and who gives himself to creatures, gives them orientation for their behaviour both in communicating with each other and in living in community (communio). Thus, in our Communicative Theology, we have expanded the axioms of Theme Centered Interaction (TCI), as initially developed by Ruth Cohn, to include genuine theological options.

Parameters: Dimensions and Levels, Axioms, and Options

Communicative Theology arose against the background of the model proposed by TCI, behind which stand the axioms of humanistic psychology and the rules of human interaction in group-processes. The four dimensions find expression in the scheme I-WE-IT-GLOBE and stand for:

- the personal experience of living and believing (I)
- the experience of community and of being the Church (WE)
Communicative Theology is not about an idyllic world of successful communication: on the contrary, all its dimensions include all that is fragmentary, broken, endangered, or irreconcilably alien.

Communicative Theology operates on three levels, these are:

- the level of immediate participation
- the level of conscious experience and interpretation
- the level of methodical theological reflection

We do not always operate on all these levels, but it is necessary to grow in awareness of these different levels.

Underlying this schema is the conviction that methodical theological thinking is only possible as a “re-flection”—a *Nach-Denken*: this re-flection can only engage its “object” when it is itself involved in the process of believing and questioning, and that process necessarily affects and involves other persons, who likewise participate as “subjects” in this process. In a typical Communicative Theology working group, all the participants are recognized as “experts”, each in their own way. Among them, of course, are those who are competent and experienced on the scientific-scholarly level, that is, those normally regarded as “experts.” As participating leaders, the theologians are responsible, in a special way, for maintaining the balance between the four dimensions (the I, the We, the Living Tradition, and the Globe), although always in cooperation with all of those who have participated in the planning group.

In particular, the theologians are responsible for the attention paid to the dimension of the living Tradition, which provides orientation and serves as the dynamic norm. However, the repeated re-introduction of this dimension into the communicative process by way of calling it to mind and informing about its contents and implications must likewise maintain the balance. It must not take place in an authoritarian, but rather in a communicative manner, which creates a space for personal witness.

The self-revelation of God in creation and history — in particular in the incarnation of the divine person whom we call the Son of God — is the presupposition of every form of theology in Christianity; without this self-communication, there can be no Communicative Theology. The task of (Communicative) Theology is to open up the *I* and the *WE*, as well as the living *TRADITION* confronting the *GLOBE*, which is constituted by the state of the world, in such a

- the biblical witnesses as well as those of other religions and world views as they are transmitted in a living way in a process of tradition (IT)
- the world—socially, culturally, and environmentally (GLOBE)
way that the central truth, “in the beginning is relationship”, becomes visible and experiential “in the middle” where all four dimensions find their focal point.

Ruth Cohn’s TCI is delineated in terms of *three axioms* which have been incorporated into Communicative Theology and explored in terms of their significance for group work in the promotion of living learning. They are:

- a human being is simultaneously autonomous and interdependent
- respect is due to all living things and their development free decisions take place within external and internal limits: these limits, however, can be expanded.

Here too, we have gone beyond TCI in our Communicative Theology, and, thus, in our research group, we have formulated four additional defining options:

- an option for patience, based on grace, when struggling with one’s unrealistic view of what is possible
- an option for the poor
- an option for “standing fast, even when nothing seems to work”
- an option for contemplation and the mystic-mystagogical

It is not difficult to see that a theology of Grace and a theology of the Cross stand behind these options. Grace means, among other things, that what is most important in our lives, that is, their infinite value, is something received as a gift and is not in any way dependent upon our own achievements. The Cross means that God has made himself to be the redeeming sacrifice, so that we do not need to crucify each other or to seek scapegoats or to sacrifice other human beings.

These are the grounds for our “patience” and our scepticism about fantasies of what we can achieve on our own. From this foundation emerges also the “preferential option for the poor”, which has been postulated, specifically, by Liberation Theology. By following the Crucified One, who in his determination to reconcile victim and perpetrator and thereby experienced failure, we find the courage to exercise the option of “standing fast, even when nothing seems to work.” The fourth option locates the work of Communicative Theology within the holistic process of becoming fully human, for which both meditation (contemplation) on our experiences and initiation by way of mystagogy into the experience of living faith are paramount.

**Conclusion**

Communicative Theology, as I have described it, must be guided by a spirituality that finds expression, specifically, in the four options mentioned above. Like TCI, Communicative Theology understands itself as linking the experiences which the individual I and the group or
communal WE both have with the project of *FAITH*, taking account, at the same time, of the enveloping *GLOBE*--social, cultural, and environmental--that constitutes the concrete reality in which we find ourselves. The I, the WE, and the GLOBE must take their orientation from the witnesses that are normative for the community of *FAITH*. Thus, the ultimate norm is not the self-directed experience of the I or the group-related experience of the WE; neither is it the experience of the GLOBE as such; instead it is the experience of the communicative God within the space defined by all four dimensions.

At a time marked by a growing trend toward individualized, “personal” experience of God, on the one hand, and toward the formation of closed-off groups, on the other hand, it is imperative to direct our attention, time and again, to the Gospel (and to the other witnesses to God’s self-revelation). Scholarly theology has an essential contribution to make to the development of intellectual and spiritual responsibility. Repeatedly, we have been privileged to experience how, in the practice of Communicative Theology, communicatio and communio can come alive.

When this occurs, we speak of a gift we receive as a “given” WE. That this experience be given again and again in the church is the goal of all our efforts.

**Literature**


The Practice Of Communicative Theology: Introduction To A New Theological Culture

*By Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, NY: Crossroad, 2008*

**Table of Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction by Bradford Hinze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Theology as Process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Preliminary Observations about the Communicative Character of Human Beings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The “Battle of the Gods” as a Dilemma in a Communication-Conscious Society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: The Communicative God of Christian Revelation and God’s Communication in History</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: The Church as a Community of Communication: The “We” as Gift</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Communication as a Practice of Theological Awareness: The Perspective of TCI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Keeping the Faith Tradition and Implicit “God-Talk” in Balance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8: Theme Takes Shape: Drama on the Eve of the Council of Nicaea and Drama in the Church Today</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue: Much Is Under Way</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selected Ideas (organized by Frances Forde Plude)

The theological work of Scharer and Hilberath represents pedagogy, group process and adult faith formation, influenced by Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI), developed by Ruth C. Cohn. The authors have developed a series of five-day seminars for persons working in ecclesial communities and in schools. They have also organized two large meetings at the University of Innsbruck and in Stuttgart. The U.S. theologian Bradford Hinze has been present at the European conferences and has written the Introduction to this book.

Hinze notes in his Introduction there have been four influential approaches to modes of communication in North American theology (p. 3ff):

- dialogical personalism in the life of faith
- the hermeneutic of discourse in the church, academy, and society
- communication in the construction of local theologies, and
- the ‘new Areopagus’ established by modern communication technologies

Hinze states:

(These authors) are experimenting with, and reflecting on, group processes that promote personal and collective discernment and decision making in the church. Their main achievement is that they have developed a theologically integrated approach to group communicative practices… that speaks out of the word and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council… (and) embodies some of the most important insights into the practices of Base Christian Communities and Small Christian Communities… (p. 9)

Vocabulary and Models of Communicative Theology and Theme Centered Interaction

(Ruth Cohn’s Model)  (Scharer/Hilberath Communicative Theology)

I = Individuals with their life and faith history

We = People in groups, communities, with their inter-communication

It (content) = The faith tradition
Globe (environment) = The global reality of society and church

[The model is pictured with the first three in a triangle, enclosed in a circle (Globe).]

Some Basic Principles of Communicative Theology

- The practice of faith is a point of departure; this is a communicative process.

- Communication between God and human beings reveals truth in relationship. (p. 20)

- The search for ‘truth in relationship’ characterizes theological inquiry as a communicative theology event. (p. 20)

- In the relationship between theologians doing scholarly work and pastoral ministers working in parishes the former is ‘theology done in official quarters and imparted from the top down’… this may be correct, but it will not alter practice. (p. 22)

- Communicative Theology sees ‘conflict-rich confrontation at the border’ (from Habermas’s theory of communicative action); the ‘globe’ in which Communicative Theology takes place (God, the world) involves ‘confrontation and difference’ (p. 38)

- Communicative Theology remains open to issues of prayer, liturgy, and mystical experiences.

- The fundamentalist refuses to go to the roots of communicative processes. (p. 44)

- Churches and theology cannot escape the globalization of communication nor the trend toward more effective communication.

- With Vatican II “the accent shifted from strictly unilateral communicative action on God’s part to differentiated and mutual action involving the human respondent, making the communicative event clearly recognizable as the defining feature.” (p. 72)

- Today, “it is difficult to experience a church structured on hierarchical communication as being a credible witness to the participatory self-revelation of God.” (p. 77)
Selective Areas For Further Research/Development Noted By Scharer/Hilberath (p. 169ff)

- Tools needed for analysis of the theology implicit in communication processes
- Identifying communicative theologies in diocesan synods, pastoral conferences, etc.
- How can the TCI ‘communicative’ and the ‘systematic’ be reconciled with each other?
- How can input be structured so as not to distort the communication process?

[Other areas are also listed by the authors.]
Theme-Centered Interactions (Tci): An Introduction

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Abstract

This text gives a general introduction to the concept of theme-centered interaction (TCI) by Ruth C. Cohn. Cohn’s biography as founder of TCI, and the various influences she had on the approach, help to explain the background of the concept of “living learning.” The basic theory and practical elements of the TCI system continue to influence the reception of the concept in higher education. TCI is concerned especially with the challenges of cultural and religious diversity in social and educational fields.

1. What Is Theme-Centered Interaction?

TCI is the standard abbreviation for the concept discovered (or created) by Ruth C. Cohn in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. Another label for TCI is “living learning,” which emphasizes more the didactic intention behind this idea. As the official term “TCI by Ruth Cohn” indicates, the concept connects an understanding of living learning in groups with the biography, experiences, and reflections of its founder. More on this connection in the next section.

Ruth C. Cohn was one of the most famous Humanistic Psychologists in the 20th century. She was born in Berlin into a German-Jewish family, like so many people in our contemporary world, to become an immigrant. Because of the emerging Nazi terror in Germany, she emigrated first to Switzerland and later to the United States. But the well-educated psychoanalyst failed to get a job in her profession. So, by necessity, she came into contact with education and pedagogical-didactic concepts while working with children. Later, she taught at different institutions, like Clark University in Massachusetts. After returning to Europe in the 1970s and taking up residence again in Switzerland, she was honored with numerous awards: honorary doctorates from the Universities of Hamburg and Bern as well as the Grand Cross of Merit for her works in the fields of psychology and pedagogy by the then President of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker. Despite all the effort put into her work and the honors she received at a later age she never forgot the ambivalence life faces us with. Dealing with TCI as a didactic concept for higher education is not some neutral discourse about what makes learning effective; rather, it is an existential act of creating a learning theory and practice that is aware of the fundamental questions and needs of humans and human societies in a globalized world. It sounds like homage to her educational intentions when Ruth C. Cohn writes:
I want to have eyes that peer out of my room, beyond the flowers and the waterfalls and the birds, beyond the meadows and mountains and national borders, to see the boats afloat on the cold waves, full of women and children, raped by pirates, bereft of their last grain of rice and the last shirt on their back. I want to have ears that hear the cries of those drowning, the cries of men in torture chambers […] and the cries of women and children who must witness the pain of martyrdom of their loved ones. I want to encourage all those people who have suffered a misery they did not invite, not to resign, not to feel helpless, but to use their imagination and their capacity to act to express their solidarity and to remain active for as long as we can still feel autonomous forces in our souls” (Cohn & Farau 2008, 374).

TCI served her in accompanying children, youth, students, grown-ups, adults and elderly people toward a comprehensive awareness, solidarity and arising self-responsibility.

In the Handbook of Theme-Centered Interaction (cf. Schneider-Landolf et al. 2017, transl. by Joseph Smith), J. Spielmann defines TCI more systematically:

TCI is a comprehensive, holistic action concept that has the goal of shaping situations in which humans interact, work, live and learn together such that they consciously experience each other as humane and humanizing. The focus lies on taking action in groups, teams, and organizations. TCI represents a differentiated method of observing situations as well as controlling and accompanying social processes. This includes the tasks such as planning, leading, intervention, reflection, analysis, and diagnosis. The overall goal is to create professional and learning processes producing optimal results that reflect the common goals, the interactions between the various parties involved, and the individual interests and their circumstances. TCI relies on a vision of humanity and a value system that reflect the ability of humans to change and learn (Spielmann 2017, 14f).

In the last two decades, TCI has spread from Europe to India and other English-speaking countries. Therefore, any book on TCI in higher education in English which includes cross-cultural experiences will be beneficial. I think these experiences will have a high impact on intercultural didactics based on TCI and in general. In India, the first TCI Hindu and Muslim trainers graduated in 2016. In Ruth C. Cohn’s letters in the archive in Berlin she expressed her pleasure about the developments of TCI in different cultures besides Europe and the United States. She was interested in seeing TCI adapted to other cultures and contexts where the approach might also prove beneficial and fitting.
The Institute responsible for the quality of education during this cross-cultural expansion of TCI was the Ruth Cohn Institute for TCI International (RCI international), which offers TCI training on three levels:

- Basic training
- Advanced training
- Graduation (Certified Trainer)

In addition to my own experiences in encounter groups (sensitivity training), gestalt groups, systemic work, supervision, and my academic qualifications in history, theology, and didactics, I qualified at all three levels of TCI training. For the past 25 years I have been working as a certified TCI trainer mainly in the academic field as well as in cross-cultural and trans-religious groups in different countries. Having qualifications in specific professional fields and a broad experience in group work, especially in TCI, corresponds to the typical profile of a certified TCI trainer.

2. Involvements

“‘It’s the writing for ‘science’ that deadens me.’“ I found this confession in Ruth C. Cohn’s “logbook” where she noted her thoughts day by day during her visiting professorship at Clark University (Massachusetts) in 1973. She had found her new style of writing through interacting with the readers of her texts. She writes: “[...] a new spirit in writing which lets the person come in, and I learned so much from each of them – while I have so much trouble with the kind of books that quote and define without flesh and blood” (entry of January 20, 1973). This experience demonstrates her high level of writing about a concept that has influenced didactics for decades and continues to do so today. I hope Ruth C. Cohn would not be disturbed by my quoting her since the sources are near to me and not at all “without flesh and blood.”

When I am working with larger or smaller groups according to the TCI style, the process of learning always lies at the center of my thoughts – not some abstract theory of didactics. It is also present in my mind when I am preparing a lecture for a large audience, in which case, it becomes an inner process that leads me intuitively through the main aspects of the TCI concept. For the most part, my work does not demand my explaining TCI, but benefiting from it. When working with groups and classes, introducing “TCI theory” happens organically, step by step, while experiencing the actual TCI process. When “learning” TCI in the context of didactics in higher education, this seems to me generally crucial. Ever since the book “The Shift from Teaching to Learning” (cf. Welbers & Gaus 2005) appeared, the learning process of students (and lectures) lies at the center of attention. Dealing with this idea of learning instead of teaching in practice comes close to the ideal of TCI.
While writing this introduction to TCI, I have tried to balance out the core insights culled from the enormous literature (this is my “It,” the topic as a writer), while adding experiences of my own and others, especially of Ruth C. Cohn (the “I perspective”) and insights taken from concrete interactional processes (the “We perspective). All this happens in a context (the “Globe” as environment) of (post-)modern society, research, and practice in didactics. For years, I have worked with mixed Muslim-Christian students at my university as well as with cross-cultural and trans-religious groups in India (cf. Scharer 2017a) and other countries. So, the actual “Globe,” in the sense of a globalized, post-migration world (cf. Yildiz 2018), is strongly embedded in my mind. I am convinced that, -- in a world in which individuality, plurality and diversity, sympathy and empathy, resonance and response, on the one hand, as well as a new upcoming individualism, populism, nationalism and fundamentalism (leading right up to violence), on the other hand, are a stark reality -- the humanistic inspiration of the Jewish immigrant Ruth C. Cohn can stimulate the didactics of all higher education.

I was not part of the “inner circle” of Ruth C. Cohn when she came back to Europe after her immigration, first to Switzerland and later to the States. I met this inspirational woman first around 1993, when she invited a group of my university students and myself to participate in a short workshop with her at her home in Hasliberg/Goldern (Switzerland), where she had settled after moving back from the United States to Europe. From then on, we stayed in contact. I last saw her about 1 year before her death in 2010 at the house of Helga Herrmann in Düsseldorf (Germany).

Together with my wife Michaela, I am working on registering the huge spiritual heritage of Ruth C. Cohn at the Archive of the Humboldt University in Berlin (Germany). Working on this legacy, combined with the deep connection between my understanding of what TCI means and the biography of its founder, has brought her even closer to my heart and mind. When separated from the story of its founder, TCI results in a superficial meaning. Based on this insight, in the next section I reflect on the influence and importance of Ruth C. Cohn had the concept of TCI, especially with respect to didactic issues.

### 3. The Inspiration of a Famous Jewish Immigrant

Storytelling is today a familiar aspect of didactics. It introduces learners to their specific tasks and topics. In this text I would like to attempt a particular kind of storytelling: recounting the story of the famous Jewish immigrant who broadly influenced didactics.

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80 The University of Innsbruck, Austria, where I have been working as a full professor of didactics and religious education since 1996, is a full university with about 30,000 students.

81 In that time, I was a professor at the Catholic University of Linz, Austria.
In a globalized and (post-)migration context, it seems essential to me to highlight the immigrant status of the founder of TCI (cf. Cohn 1970b). When I met with Ruth C. Cohn for the last time in the house of Helga Herrmann, who was taking care of her, Helga told me that Ruth was suffering severely from painful memories, like those of images of the Nazi regime. The doors and windows to the house had to be closed and barricaded to prevent the Gestapo from entering.

3.1. Childhood, Youth, and Nazi Terror

Ruth C(harlotte) Cohn, née Hirschfeld, was born in 1912 in Berlin and died in 2010 in Düsseldorf (Germany). She grew up in a liberal Jewish family. Her parents – her mother was a pianist, her father a businessman – were pleasant people who took good care of her. She had a wonderful childhood and adolescence – until the Nazi terror spread throughout Germany and threatened young Ruth and her boyfriend. As an intelligent student, Ruth C. Cohn had, of course, read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (as well as *The Capital* of Karl Marx) and was acutely aware what would happen with the Jews in Germany.

Before all this occurred, however, her conviction was that she was a born poet. She had written poetry from the age of 7 and she wanted to make a career out of it (cf. Cohn 1949; 1965; 1990). But then she was told that one could not make a living as a poet. Her father believed that, even if a girl were to marry, she should have a profession by which she could earn a living if necessary. Becoming a journalist seemed to be an acceptable compromise. With this aim in mind, she started studying economics in Heidelberg. During the first semester, however, she discovered that economics was not going to be her subject. But in Heidelberg, she also met Gundolf, the celebrated author who had done research on Goethe, who quickly became Ruth C. Cohn’s idol. Goethe and his pantheism became a significant influence on her worldview.

During the second semester, she returned to Berlin and met her first boyfriend. His mother was a psychoanalyst. So, for the first time, Ruth C. Cohn heard the word psychoanalysis. From this time on she was determined to become a therapist. But it was also around 1932 that the Nazis attacked her Jewish friend together with other politically active Jewish students. It became clear to Ruth C. Cohn that she could no longer study in Berlin.

3.2 Emigration to Switzerland and the Psychoanalytic Couch

At the end of March 1933 – one day before the first boycott of Jews occurred in Germany – Ruth C. Cohn officially went to Zurich to continue her studies. Living in Switzerland as a student meant not having refugee status. Thus, she could not stop studying because they would then have expelled her. “Up to 1941, Ruth Cohn studied psychology as well as education, theology, literature, and philosophy in Zurich […]” (Greving 2017, 17). In addition to her studies at the university, the most decisive experience in Zurich was Ruth’s intense training in psychoanalysis:
Between 1933 and 1939, six times a week I spent 50 minutes on the couch. My analyst listened
to me patiently. He was young and attractive. I knew that, however, only because I saw him once
when I entered or once when I left the room when we shook hands (Cohn & Farau 2008, 214).

The irony of the last sentence of this quotation reveals a point of criticism that Ruth C. Cohn
subsequently turned against classic psychoanalysis. This criticism spawned her lifelong quest for
alternative therapeutic opportunities and procedures. She was horrified at realizing that, during
analysis, her psychoanalyst had become the center of her life:

My thoughts and my feelings revolved around his person, his questions, his
statements, his attitudes. I believed that he had some special knowledge, and that
he was leading me infallibly, so that, if the analysis did not go well, it would be
entirely my fault (Cohn & Farau 2008, 214).

The “positive” therapeutic transfer neurosis Ruth C. Cohn suffered from during her years of
psychoanalysis was fostered by the dogmatical psychoanalytic setting. The resolution of her
therapeutic transfer dependency occurred because of events that lay outside the psychoanalytic
setting. Her analyst had advised Ruth C. Cohn not to make any existentially important decisions
during analysis. But, in 1938, she had to marry her boyfriend Hans Helmut Cohn because it was
the only way to save his parents from the gas chambers. In 1940, her daughter Heidi was born.
She met many other challenges as a Jewish emigrant during this time, for example, losing her
German citizenship in 1936. Furthermore, she started using her German middle “Charlotte” only
with an abbreviation (C.). Despite all these experiences and her critique of her own analysis, she
never lost her vision that psychoanalysis could trigger a new, more humane approach. She was
convinced the deep self-knowledge that psychotherapy provides enables better self-management
and new ways of educating others (see Cohn & Farau 2008, 216).

In the end, her analyst was called up for military service as a doctor, so her analysis was
terminated by the political situation, “an analytic miracle took place” (Cohn & Farau 2008,
216):

Personal letters began arriving from my analyst who had formerly been so very
orthodox and abstemious. He had never spoken about himself and almost never
expressed any of his feelings. Now he wrote about his experiences as a doctor and
as a border guard, about his feelings, about his activity, and about the problems of
the time.

A second miracle happened when my first child was born. My former analyst
happened to be on leave just then, and he brought me a huge bouquet of flowers.
He was very touched and told me why the birth of a child was so very important to him – now, at this time, and in this situation (Cohn & Farau 2008, 216).

It is crucial to understanding about where TCI comes from, to understand the underlying experiences of Ruth C. Cohn during her first emigration to Switzerland. Her experience was ambivalent: On the one hand, she experienced an intense psychoanalysis in the style of S. Freud on the conviction that, if more people would do so, it would create a more humane awareness within all the violence. On the other hand, she expressed critique of the “couch setting” in light of the political abstinence of psychoanalysis. Confronted with new therapeutic developments, political issues, and pedagogical insights, Ruth C. Cohn discovered TCI during her second emigration – this time to the United States.

### 3.3 Emigration to the United States and the Discovery of TCI

In 1941, Ruth C. Cohn left Switzerland with her husband and her daughter Heidi. Their decision to leave Switzerland was triggered by the (false) report in the media that the Germans had passed the border and entered Switzerland. The odyssey experienced by the many immigrants today was part of Ruth C. Cohn’s second emigration experience:

> We were put in a sealed train car and traveled through the unoccupied part of France. After a veritable odyssey […] we reached Lisbon and got on one of the last ships to cross the ocean after the outbreak of World War II. (Cohn & Farau 2008, 217)

Upon arriving in the United States, Ruth C. Cohn had to overcome many obstacles. “The emigration 1941 to America was flight and hope. I hardly can find images of the first years […],” she told her friend Helga Herrmann later (Herrmann 1993, 28). Reading her notes from her first years in the United States touches me deeply:

- Without a medical degree, this highly qualified psychoanalyst failed to get a work permit for the New York Psychoanalytic Institute.

- The relationship to her husband became more and more difficult. Hans Helmut became staff doctor at a public psychiatric hospital in New York State, and Ruth was allowed to test patients and do therapy with children there. After one year’s time, she took a leave from the hospital. In the end, she divorced her husband after giving birth to her second child, Peter, in 1944.

- The two grandmothers took care of the small children while she was establishing – in the evening up to midnight – a psychoanalytic practice in New York.
• Personal illness and her role as a working single mother produced deep conflicts in her.

What enabled Ruth C. Cohn to survive?

• Her work as an assistant teacher in the Bank Street Schools, where she experienced a progressive teacher training: “Living learning” – I had yet to discover this term and had not heard it used by others. Looking back, I now know that Bank Street was the source of my love for living learning: following in the tracks laid by the child’s interest” (Cohn & Farau, 2008, 327).

• She met the Viennese psychoanalyst Theodor Reik (1948) and became head of the Training Committee of his training institute, called the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP).

• She became acquainted with Harry Stack Sullivan’s thoughts on an open form of psychotherapy based on the interpersonal relationship, which she experienced with the psychoanalyst Ruth Forster.

• She learned to pay attention to bodily signals and the creative therapeutic group work like that found in meeting with L. Moreno and his psychodrama approach.

• Her contact with Humanistic Psychology through G. Bach, H. and V. Guze (Cohn 1971b, 6-7; 23-25), F. Perls, E. Polster, C. Rogers, V. Satir, J. Warkentin and C. Whitaker. The two nearest to her in this humanistic movement were C. Rogers with his client-centered psychotherapy and F. Perls with his gestalt therapy.

• Overcoming the therapeutic distance through “normal” communication proved to be a revolutionary experience that would never leave Ruth C. Cohn. It was crucial to the development of her approach.

The development of TCI by Ruth C. Cohn is a classic example of how pedagogical and didactic approaches are not discovered at a theoretical, discursive level. Nevertheless, to understand something about TCI, it seems helpful to travel some steps further in the shoes of its founder and take a more in-depth look at what the approach means (Cohn 1969, 31).
3.4 A Vital Dream: The Birth of TCI

The context in which TCI was “born” was a workshop on counter transference\textsuperscript{82} led by Ruth C. Cohn in 1955. During the lengthy process concerned with how to teach TCI, a dream played a significant role. In this dream, she saw an equilateral pyramid. Upon waking it was evident to her that she had literally “dreamed up” the basis of her work. In her interpretation, the four points of the pyramid represent the four aspects important to group work. These points – later modified in favor of the image of a triangle within a circle – are all interconnected and equally important. They are:

- The \textit{person} interacting with others and with the theme at hand (= I)
- The \textit{group} members who become a group by attending to the theme at hand and through their interaction (= We)
- The \textit{theme} at hand, the task as being apparent before the group (= It)
- The \textit{environment}, which influences the group and is influenced by the group, i.e., the \textit{umwelt} in the narrowest and broadest sense of the word (= Globe) (Cohn & Farau 2008, 343).

For Ruth C. Cohn, groups are always embedded in a certain environment. This environment can be seen, either as this specific space and moment, or as something as big as the universe. In an interview, she explains:

In any case, we find ourselves caught up in an environment. So, symbolically, we can imagine this idea as a triangle, with all angles and sides equal, and enclosed in a sphere representing the infinity around us. … And this is the idea: any group is basically a triangle, consisting of I, YOU, and IT. But the specific method that we call Theme-Centered Interaction is an interaction, an interplay between people around the topic. This method has the characteristic that these three points are seen as being equally important. You see, if you have a lecture, only two elements are important: the lecturer and the subject matter. And the listeners sit in a row, and they don’t see each other; they’re not supposed to; it is the same case in a

\textsuperscript{82}“The psychoanalytic term of transference denotes the expression of wishes and feelings that were originally connected with important persons in the individual’s past (primarily one’s parents) and which are then relived in the relationship to individuals in the present (i.e., group leaders, therapists, etc.). In psychoanalysis, transference is considered an important aid in overcoming repressed conflicts. However, within TCI the emphasis lies on examining and correcting these distortions in perception (transference) based on its realistic content. Resolving difficulties that lie in the life history of the individual is reserved for psychoanalytic methods.” (Kuebel & Volker-Schuetz 2016, 293). Counter transference means that transference is also reciprocal in therapeutic processes.
classroom. Perhaps in a classroom, the students know one another; however, the system forces them not to work together, but against one another, to see who are the best among them, for only the best, second best, third best, and so on, has a chance in life. To counter that tendency – now I come back to therapy – let me say, we should nowadays do population therapy, saying, we are all equally important; we are human beings. And wherever we find ourselves in groups, in families, in villages, in communities, in schools, in parishes, everywhere we are all important human beings with different functions and different tasks (Scharer & Hilberath 2008, 110ff.).

At first, Ruth C. Cohn spoke about her approach as the “theme-centered interactional method” (TIM) (Cohn, 1971a). “In the original German translations of her English writings, Ruth Cohn used the term ‘thematische interaktionelle Methode, TIM’ (literally thematic interactional method)” (Schneider-Landolf 2017, 147). Later on, she changed the term to “theme-centered interaction” because she was afraid (and disturbed) that the methodological aspect would overrule the humanistic attitude aspect, which is mainly expressed in the axioms and postulates of TCI (see section 3 of this text).

In 1966, together with Norman Liberman, Ruth C. Cohn founded the Workshop Institute for Living Learning (WILL) in New York (cf. Gordon & Liberman 1972, 2001). There, group therapists and supervisors came together to implement TCI in non-therapeutic groups and institutions. WILL Canada, was later established with the same intention. The step of enabling TCI in teaching facilities and institutions was thus achieved. The first workshops at WILL were orientated toward social issues: “Segregation – Collision – Co-Existence – Integration” was one of the first themes treated at WILL. It expressed the goal of integrating citizens of all colors (“Blacks and Whites”) in social institutions. Using TCI in the field of learning resulted in directly satisfying socio-political consequences.

3.5 The Couch Is Too Small: Therapy and Education for All

For Ruth C. Cohn, it was a long journey from doing therapy with individuals to working in and with groups. In the process, she came to develop an approach that, not only served to heal specific personality and group conflicts, but above all worked preventively to help people to help themselves. Increasingly, Ruth C. Cohn foresaw the application of her approach “to large sections of population” (Matzdorf & Cohn 1992, 1272) or even “to society” as a whole. Having lived as a refugee herself, this middle-class woman had experienced social needs first-hand: “This is how I moved from individuals to society; the circumstances forced me to do so” (Cohn, 1989, 86). She later explained:
The couch was too small. The new world of discovering the psychodynamic laws could as a matter of principle lead to a conscience-expanding, humanizing pedagogy, but how? For over 30 years I have worked in the historical process of personal and mental interaction on a systematic attempt to integrate pedagogical-therapeutic elements in teaching as well as other groups of communication (Cohn 2009, 7).

In 1965-1966 Ruth C. Cohn completed an additional course in gestalt therapy with Fritz Perls, from which she appropriated much for her own concept. But she had problems with a kind of autonomy that is not balanced with a person’s interdependence and social responsibility, as expressed in Perl’s “Gestalt Prayer”:

I do what I do, and you do what you do.  
I am not in the world to live up to your expectations.  
You are not in the world to live up to mine.  
You are you and I am I.  
If we find one another by chance – wonderful!  
If not, there is nothing one can do about it. (Perls 1996, 13).

Perl’s way of thinking regarding “I am I, and you are you …” and his notion of self-support were taken up by Ruth C. Cohn and further developed in another direction:

I want to do what I am doing. I am I.  
You want to do what you are doing. You are you.  
The world is our task. It does not meet our expectations.  
However, if we commit ourselves to it, it will become beautiful.  
If we don’t, it won’t (Cohn 1974, 164).

One can recognize in these thoughts Ruth C. Cohn’s awareness of society and politics, also apparent in a speech she gave at the Theodor Reik Clinique in 1957, titled “Courage – The Goal of Psychotherapy” (cf. Cohn 1957). I found the manuscript in the archives. It seems to me still very current and fitting for a didactic concept for the path to a post-migration society. Courageous persons are aware of dangers and therefore know fears. They are, however, relatively free of anxiety. Anxiety is not fear of immediate danger but a “hangover fear” of previous – real or imaginary – threats. “Anxiety is like a bag of fears dragged along from earlier years” (Cohn 1957, 11). For Ruth C. Cohn “…courage is one of our most precious abilities in daily living. So, we may indeed want to be sure to help develop courage […]” (Cohn 1957, 10).

With respect to education, Cohn remarks in her speech:
Courageous people create schools where children do not sit still for many years to learn little more than three “R’s” and to conform to thought patterns of prejudice which have kept society from progress; schools will be places where children are inspired to use their imagination, thoughtfulness, and creativity – so they will be eager to improve our world rather than to stagnate (Cohn 1957, 15).

The courage to change the educational system is not only related to schools. Working with TCI in higher education always has a social and political component to it as well. It does not only matter what goes on in the classroom; the whole learning system of universities and colleges in their capacity as the influential Globe comes into mind. Questions come up concerning the lower importance of learning in the science-oriented world of universities (Knauf 2005, 183), hierarchies, architecture, learning settings, etc.

3.6 “To Give Too Little Is Theft; To Give Too Much Is Murder”

One cannot understand Ruth C. Cohn’s approach to education without looking at her close relationship with children. This relationship was conditioned by having to raise her two children herself. After she was divorced from her husband, she had to take care of the two children, Heidi and Peter, as a single mother:

Nobody taught me more about human relationships or education than my own children. From the time they were born (in Heidi’s case until she got married, in Peter’s case until he went to college) they were at one and the same time the object of a loving relationship and my most important task in life (Cohn & Farau 2008, 331).

Despite this closeness, Ruth C. Cohn did not become nostalgic about her children and their education. Quite the opposite, she wrote openly about the doubts that she had in her everyday decisions regarding their education. For years, the idea that she had to be a perfect mother who could make no mistakes stood in the way. For a long time, her own educational approach was directed toward the future of her children rather than toward their present:

Only slowly did I come to learn from and with, my children to treasure the present moment, to trust that the guidelines of my action would always be revealed in becoming, that is, in the process of living. […] Parents and children are both teachers and learners. If solutions for conflicts are sought in openness, humility, and love, errors on both sides will not be disastrous. The tools for the dialogue are not violence, but rather the inner and outer reality (Cohn & Farau 2008, 332).
The above-mentioned Bank Street School, designed around the program of “progressive education,” was for Ruth C. Cohn, “the source of my love for living learning” (Cohn & Farau 2008, 327). With the utmost attention and engagement, she took part in the learning processes and immediate experiences of the children:

[…] to track the steps of a child’s interest from the crib to the floor, from the floor to the doorway, from the doorway into the next room, to mother’s feet and then up to her knees, then up to the table and over to the dangerous stove, from the kitchen to the doorway opening onto the street – with all its noisy cars, buses, building sites – out to the playground, to the trains, the subways, to the airport. All of these stations along the way leading from one here-and-now to the next, to another…. For it is in the here-and-now of experience that lies the starting point of all learning. Learning is not something imposed from above, but rather it is something to be grasped in a living way with body, soul, intellect, and spirit. (Cohn & Farau 2008, 327.)

The importance of what we can learn from the story becomes apparent. Nevertheless, Ruth C. Cohn judged certain aspects in the Bank Street School’s educational system as problematic, for example, the exclusively technical orientation of the school, the repression of personal feelings on the part of the teachers, the children’s power over the teaching staff. She called for a means of balance between “giving too much” and “giving too little”: “To give too little is theft; to give too much is murder,” Cohn concluded (1981, 23-27). Rather, there is a need for “accepting one’s own authority as well as own fallibility” (Cohn 1985, 676-683).

3.7 Back to Europe

It was not easy for a Jewish immigrant to go back to Europe. When Ruth C. Cohn was invited to the Fourth International Congress on Group Psychotherapy, she met with Austrian and German colleagues working in the same field. The reaction of a participant at the Congress in Vienna may have built the first bridge enabling her to go back after all that had happened to the Jews. She reports:

At the end of the congress, an elderly gentleman came up to me and excitedly said: “I now realize why they let us contemplate things in silence and allowed us to speak as ‘I’: That was their way of avoiding mass suggestion and mass hysteria.” I had never thought about silence in this way. […] That this was one of the first comments a participant from Germany offered on TCI made me feel happy for a long time (Cohn & Farau 2008, 380).
Also, she “felt uneasy at first; being in this German-Austrian environment, surrounded by the unaccustomed German language. But that soon passed in light of the heartfelt welcome I received from my colleagues,” said Ruth C. Cohn (Cohn & Farau 2008, 376).

During these first contacts in Europe, like the Psychotherapy Meetings in Lindau (Cohn 2008, 65-79), she planned a new institute in the States. After having a difficult time as a refugee, she had now become well known in psychotherapeutic as well as in educational circles of North America. In 1971, she was honored with the “Psychologist of the Year Award” by the New York Society for Clinical Psychology. In 1973, she held a guest professorship at Clark University in Massachusetts, at the same institution from which S. Freud received his “Doctor of Laws honoris causa” in 1909 (cf. Freud Museum in Vienna).

In the end, Ruth C. Cohn had to decide whether to stay in America and to visit Europe from time to time as she had done since 1968, or to move to Europe again. In 1972, before moving back to Europe, some German and Swiss colleagues founded WILL Europe. At the same time, the first curriculum was being devised for TCI group leaders. In 1973, Cohn closed her American practice and moved to Switzerland, where she settled in the vicinity of the Ecole d’Humanité, an alternative school in Hasliberg, in the Bern Highlands. In what she called the “big view from a small apartment” – her description of her tiny 40 m² apartment in a farmhouse – many a disciple, friend, and acquaintance came and went. Her hospitality, her mastery of dialogue, her openness, but also her capacity for social and political commitment, were something I, too, had the privilege of experiencing firsthand while on a visit with a couple of theology students from Linz. In a matter of minutes, she engaged the students in an intensive discourse on their relationship to church and society. With her long flowing hair, the nearly 70-year-old Ruth, sitting on her “bouncing ball,” looked like the youngest as well as the most mature member of the group.

According to the documents of the Ruth Cohn Archive in Berlin, Ruth C. Cohn received the greatest attention during the 1980s and 1990s, due to the wide range of workshops and lectures she held and the many awards she received. When she was to be honored with the title of honorary doctor (Dr. Phil. h.c.) by the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Hamburg, the students had been involved in a strike against the university systems for months. Ruth C. Cohn heard about this. Spontaneously she arrived a few days before the designated celebration and conducted group work with students and held lectures. Newspapers spoke of “the great communicator who prevents violence and brings enemies together.” The nearly 3,500 letters in the archive bear witness to the many important communication partners of Ruth C. Cohn in the areas of pedagogy, philosophy, religion/theology, therapy, politics, etc. Much research on TCI was going on at this time. There is not enough space in this chapter to report on all the famous and influential workshops she facilitated to the end of her life. A comprehensive bibliography on TCI is available at the homepage of the RCI International under the research button.
In the last years (cf. Cohn 1987, 210-221) of her life, Ruth C. Cohn lived in Düsseldorf in the house of Helga Herrmann, who took care of her. She died there in 2010 at the high age of 98 and was buried in the “Waldfriedhof.”

4. The Basics of TCI

Working on the basics of TCI means being confronted with huge amount of literature available in different languages. What I therefore offer to the reader at the beginning of this section is a list the most common sources.

4.1 Secondary Literature on TCI – An Overview of Sources


Reiser and Lotz (cf. 1995) describe TCI with all its benefits for educational contexts. More recently, Reiser (cf. 2006) describes TCI as a professional educational concept, while W. Lotz (cf. 2003) points out the value of TCI in social educational settings.

In interviews with contemporary witnesses (cf. Bertels et al. 2015), one can find memories and interpretations concerning the beginnings of TCI. Conversations with Ruth C. Cohn from 1988 on have also been published (cf. Bühlman-Jecklin 2010). Elementary texts on TCI were reprinted in the TCI journal, which has been published continually twice a year since 1987 (von Kanitz et al., 2015). An anthology on TCI in English was published in India (cf. Kuebel & Abraham 2002). Also, a journal on TCI was published in India from 2006 to 2012.

The TCI bibliography my wife and I are working on comprises to date approximately 1,600 entries83. The Ruth Cohn Archive at the Humboldt University in Berlin (Germany), which will be opened to researchers about 10 years after Ruth C. Cohn death (i.e., in 2020), will offer new opportunities for doing research on TCI and on Ruth C. Cohn herself. Also, the history of Ruth C. Cohn in the previous section contains the basics of TCI, which should become clearer in this

83 See http://www.ruth-cohn-institute.org/tl_files/content/zentraleinhalte/dokumente/Forschung/Literaturliste_RCI-international_04-17.pdf
section. According to H. Reiser, TCI “contains an independent educational theory that is not jet fully explained in its current form of representation” (Reiser 2014, 69).  

It is not possible to summarize all the literature pertaining to the overall content and theory of TCI. One of the characteristics of TCI seems to be that “theory” and “practice” are very closely related, and that a large variety of persons with very different qualifications practice and reflect it. Therefore, we should acknowledge the manifold literature on TCI while also keeping in mind the “viewpoint” an article or book has. In Section 2 I try to make my own involvements apparent which form the basis for my descriptions of the (theoretical) basics of TCI.

4.2. Being Your Own Chairperson: Self-Responsibility and (Conditional) Freedom in the Dialectic of Autonomy and Interdependency

Contemporary didactics reflect the common shift from teaching to learning (Berendt 2005, 35-41; Deneke 2005, 93-96; Welbers 2005, 357-365). Changing the culture of teaching and learning is a big goal (cf. Schneider et al., 2009). Learning is an educational and an existential experience, and we need to reflect on it from the vantage point of the learners (Schratz et al., 2012, 21-30). This “new” trend in higher education contains TCI-adequate thinking from the very beginning. How university scholars can support their students in their growing and learning is a crucial question of modern didactics. However, within the didactic discourse on how to “make” a successful learning process, the underlying question, that is, what the basic intentions for the learning processes are, actually, remain nebulous.

The inclusive concept of TCI bridges the gap between cognition and emotion by balancing the different aspects of learning: The individual and the interactional aspect, the content, and the contextual aspect. This is done by teaching living learning as an attitude and a method. The attitude tends to be contained in the TCI axioms and postulates, the method more in the so-called TCI factors – dynamic balance, the formulation of theme as the focus of a learning process, etc. (see section 5 of this article.). It is important that attitude and method are not seen as isolated or in a specific order. Rather, all aspects are interconnected, and what is most important is what happens among all these elements.

If we reflect on the terms “axioms and postulates,” which are sometimes not distinguished from one another, we see that these terms are used mainly in logic and mathematics. Their application extends back to antiquity and refers to principles that are accepted without proof, that are “self-evident.” If one wishes to distinguish axioms and postulates, one may refer to the Greek mathematician Geminos (2nd century BC), who says “… that an axiom concerns perceptibility,

84 With “current form of representation” Reiser means the description of TCI specifics (see sections 4.2-4.4). Various TCI experts work in the field of TCI and didactics, and some of them may be found as coauthors in the chapter written by Reiser and associates in this book.
whereas the postulate deals with implementation” (Kanitz 2017, 73). In this sense, the (three)
TCI axioms reveal the image of mankind, the idea of a good life of all human beings, all
creatures, and ultimately of the whole cosmos. The two postulates resemble motives and goals in
the implementation of TCI in the sense of their axioms. The axioms and postulates express the
“holistic” image of humanity in TCI. Inherent is the assumption of a psychosomatic integrity of
personality. According to U. Faßhauer, “TCI does not foresee a separation between rationality
(cognition) and feelings (emotions). The corporeality of all human activities lies at the core of
TCI theory” (Faßhauer 2017, 75f).

TCI resembles the philosophy of the Austrian-born Jewish philosopher M. Buber, who is best
known for his philosophy of dialogue, centered on the distinction between the I-Thou
relationship and the I-It relationship (cf. Buber 1983). Reiser is of the opinion “that M. Buber's
philosophy of dialog and encounter is very close to the attitude of theme-centered interaction,
yes, even deepens it, while the method of theme-centered interaction can promote Buber’s
desired realization” (Reiser 1993, 39).

In the reception of TCI theory in communicative theology, my own field of expertise, we also
found connections to the philosophy of E. Lévinas and P. Ricoeur (Hilberath & Scharer 2012,
134-138). Ruth C. Cohn never tired of emphasizing the inseparable “cohesion of human and
intellectual value and its specific methodological approach,” and of resisting any attempt to
reduce the TCI to a technology for managing group processes (Cohn 1979, 253). This also holds
for the theory and practice of didactics in higher education. Despite one’s desire to find some
way to better handle group processes, TCI cannot be the sole method.

4.3 Dialectic Opposites and the Synthesis of Autonomy and Interdependence

Leading students to autonomy is the main goal of (post)modern didactics. Knauf sees as an
important trend in higher education, that “learning and education are being placed more and
more in the responsibility of the individuals” (Knauf 2005, 184). Yet TCI shows us much more
coherence than a simple “autonomy trip.” The first axiom “outlines a theory of development
according to which the dialectical opposites of autonomy and interdependence are consciously
transformed into a synthesis. […] It stands paradigmatically for a structure of thought that
examines opposites and paradoxes and, if possible, transfers them through conscious awareness
and decision into a productive development” (Reiser 2014, 71).

The first axiom is:

Human beings are psychobiological entities and a part of the universe. They are
equally autonomous and interdependent. The autonomy of individuals is all the
much larger, the greater they are aware of their interdependence with all and
everything (Farau & Cohn 2008, 356).

By acknowledging this main truth, we humans become relational, communicative subjects faced
with the challenge of solving the riddle of autonomy and interdependence such that a
constructive development becomes possible both in oneself and in other people. Independence
and autonomy are dialectically interwoven: “I am all the more autonomous, the more I
consciously enter into the world” (Cohn & Farau 2008, 357). Growing self-awareness leads to
growing world-awareness – and vice versa.

Based on this insight, there arises a specific cultural and social relationship in human beings. The
appropriation of the world lies from early childhood on in the tension between self-reliance and
self-responsibility and the interdependency of people; individual development occurs in which
the dialectic of autonomy and interdependence becomes more and more conscious in one’s own
life. The tension between the poles of self-determination and self-reliance and
interdependence/influence is included in TCI as a basic anthropological constant. “Personal and
individual development always takes place in connection with other human beings whenever
‘themes’ (tasks) are being processed” (Faßhauer 2017, 75). A person becomes fully human by
addressing the world with its many challenges, assignments, and knowledge.

With respect to the dialectical link between autonomy and interdependence, the first axiom – in
its original form – touches on the question of the relationship between past, present, and future.
In approaches from Humanistic Psychology, such as gestalt therapy and education, attention is
directed almost exclusively toward the here-and-now: The only thing that counts is what I am
experiencing at this very moment with “hand, heart, and mind.” Everything else is irrelevant.
Contrary to this attitude, for Ruth C. Cohn events in the past, present, and future belong
inseparably together: “My here-and-now is merely one of my human dimensions. The here-and-
now world, without an awareness of the future laying within, is shallow” (Cohn 1974, 167).

Upholding the dialectic opposites and the synthesis of autonomy and interdependence in the
context of higher education as a “productive paradox” is not easy, especially with today’s trend
toward “speed education,” aiming foremost at earning certificates (Knauf 2005, 184) and quickly
adopting skills. The idea of giving space to autonomy and interdependence is connected closely
with the first TCI postulate of being one’s own chairperson.

4.4 Be Your Own Chairperson – The Humanistic Call to Activate Self-Responsibility and
Self-Assertiveness to Decide

In the dialectic of autonomy and interdependence, human beings move – from childhood on –
along a variety of ambivalences that cannot simply be ruled out or decided on, in the one or the
other direction. The chairperson postulate, which is presented after the first axiom, does not solve these ambivalences, yet it does also not leave us helpless. Becoming one’s own chairperson is a lifelong process that starts in childhood. The more you become aware of your internal and external workings, the more mature and autonomous decisions you can come to. It is crucial how didactic theories and practices deal with this aspect. Whether an approach hinders or supports students (and teachers) in realizing their own chairpersonship is a central qualitative factor. The optimistic view TCI takes empathizes the role of chairpersonship in every human being as a personal and social ability that can be broadened through courses of higher education.

The original formulation of the chairperson postulate is as follows:

Be your own chairman, the chairman of yourself. That means:

(1) Be aware of your inner reality and of your environment.

(2) Consider every situation to be a proposition for your decisions. Take and give as befits being responsible for yourself and for others (Cohn 1975, 120f).

For reasons of gender consciousness, the postulate was eventually renamed as the “chairperson postulate” and thus reads: “Be your own chairperson …” For Röhling, the chairperson postulate “is a humanistic call to be autonomous, self-responsible, self-assertive, and not controlled by ideals or authorities” (Röhling 2017, 89). This includes an intrapersonal and an interpersonal dimension. The first step to developing the chairperson ability is a kind of contemplative introspection to activate one’s inner voices in order to differentiate what should be done (moral/ethical impulses), what would I like to do (own desires and convictions), and what must be done in a specific situation (reality). Confusions arise when these aspects are mixed together – when I do not see clearly what I want (volition). Maintaining proper contact with one’s “organismic value system” (see the “ethical” axiom), a part of all humans, leads to strong personal decisions that cannot be manipulated or “succumb to the pull of the masses. Therein lies the origin of the political-social effectiveness of the chairperson postulate” (ibid., 90). One of the main goals in higher education is to support young academics to become independent thinkers.

The chairperson postulate is strongly connected with the “I” of the autonomous and interdependent subject with its conditional freedom to make self-responsible decisions. The more one’s inner voices are activated in decision making, the more mature a decision can be:

Listen to your inner voices, to your various needs, wishes, motivations, ideas; use all your senses, listen, see, smell, observe. Use your spirit, your knowledge, your power of judgment, your responsibility, your capacity to think. Weigh your decisions carefully. No one can take your decisions away from you. You are the
most important person in your world, just as I am in mine. We must be able to express ourselves clearly when we talk to each other and listen to each other carefully as this is the only bridge between one island and another (Cohn, 2009, 164).

A further development concerning the clarification of internal conflicts can be found, among others, in the texts of Schulz von Thun (cf. 1998), who uses the concept of the “inner team” by V. Satir with explicit reference to Ruth C. Cohn (Röhling 2017, 92).

On the path from the intrapersonal to the interpersonal dimension of the chairperson postulate, the four-factor model of TCI can be helpful for clearing up the demands of the I, the We, the tasks, and the Globe: “Practice perceiving both yourself and others; give yourself and others the same attention; respect all facts such that you extend your freedom of decisions; take yourself, your environment, and the task at hand seriously” (Cohn & Farau 2008, 359f.).

According to Matzdorf and Cohn (cf. 1992), the central therapeutic and political intervention of TCI is expressed in the chairperson postulate. It enables both human individuality and solidarity. By recognizing the diversity of people, the postulate encourages interaction by true encounter. This excludes both individualism and collectivism in the sense of “isms” as extremes to be avoided. The chairperson postulate regulates the oscillation between arrogance and resignation. It encourages us to not give in into the temptation of turning to narcissistic self-reflection, which leads to the vanity that I am my own God. At the same time, chairpersonship protects us against the paralyzing powerlessness many people feel in the face of the inscrutable economic and medial contexts: “I am not all-powerful, I am not powerless. I am partially powerful” (Cohn & Farau 2008, 359). In any case, the chairperson principle would be misunderstood if interpreted as an invitation to an unrelated self-realization.

When people perceive themselves as a chairperson, becoming aware being the chairperson of themselves, it is prudent to ask whether there can be moments of lust, of art, of spiritual and religious experience, in which the chairperson is able to deliberately let go:

If we as human beings are always on call – always responsible – then at some point in time that burden will become overbearing. On the other hand, if we surrender responsibility, then we fail to experience many aspects of human life. Since we cannot completely solve this dilemma, we adopt a paradoxical formulation: Even when you are not deciding something, you bear the responsibility for your non-decisions (Röhling 2017, 93).
I consider chairpersonship as the humanistic call to self-responsibility and self-assertiveness to be a very important learning goal of all higher education, in addition to the interchangeable contents of a specific field of study.

4.5 Respect Is Due All Living Things

According to Reiser (2014, 71), the second so-called “ethical axiom” and the third so-called “political axiom” flank the dialectic between autonomy and interdependence on chairpersonship. From this point of view, it becomes clear that self-responsibility and self-assertiveness do not mean self-realization at all costs. Instead, TCI philosophy aims for interdependence toward others being granted with responsibility and in freedom, i.e., interdependence is embedded in values.

The second, the “ethical” axiom states:

Respect is due all living things and their development. Respect for development is what stands behind value-based decisions. What is humane is valuable, what is inhumane is threatening (Cohn 1975, 120).

The relatively imprecise formulation of the second axiom immediately raises the question of what is human. Ruth C. Cohn notes concrete examples:

Being a human being means, for example, not torturing any living being and killing no more of them than is necessary to sustain further life (in particular that of humans). The notion of ‘killing’ expressly includes the killing of mental and intellectual capabilities (Cohn & Farauer 2008, 357).

This unequivocal proclamation of the value of life includes respect for nature. What is human(e) may be recognizable in terms of a respectful, interactive, loving attitude; what is inhuman(e) may be revealed in a marginalizing, disrespectful, “sinful” attitude (Matzdorf & Cohn 1992, 62). The question arises as to how Ruth C. Cohn distinguishes between “good and evil” with respect to the ethical axiom. She writes:

I don’t believe that an absolute good or evil is revealed to any chosen people. But I do believe that an “indispensable” good and evil leads us, the direction of which is not static and inflexibly mandatory but is rather directed toward inner and outer circumstances. From an ethical point of view, we can understand an act and its actors only within their overall context. Ethical values are unalterable, and yet they are dependent on the process. Whoever understands oneself as a perspective-bound person, that is, as a person with a limited capacity for perception, knows
that good and evil look differently from different perspectives. I can only describe my truth, never yours. Yet I believe that there would be no differing aspects of the ethos if they were not related to the reality of an unalterable center; even though the interpretations thereof can be misleading (Cohn & Farau 2008, 467).

Ruth C. Cohn supports the hypothesis of an “innate,” “organic” sense of values, the development of which is a question of survival and which corresponds to the autonomous and yet interdependent character of human beings. Only when this innate sense of values is preserved, elaborated, and developed can the increasing rationalization and fragmentation of the world be halted and (atomic) destruction be avoided. She writes:

I believe it possible that the development of values and meaning takes place not only at the slow pace proper to evolution but also in transformational quantum leaps. Both Judeo-Christian and humanistic ethics teach values of goodness and humanity. When smirking pessimists of every age express their regret that human nature has always been inclined toward the survival of the fittest and that nothing will change this, then I protest by saying: the fact that something has been like this in past history does not mean that it must always remain like that … Animals may well be ancestors of our ethical capacity; they may have a “sense” of ethics … Yet between them and us there is a qualitative difference that offers us freedom and responsibility, music and ethos, leaving us with the task of either building community or destroying ourselves (Cohn & Farau 2008, 469f).

Because of the imprecise and, in part, misleading formulation of the second axiom, which is suspected of increased optimism, changes to the axiom are being discussed within the TCI community. Thus, Zitterbarth (2001, 104) proposed modifying the second axiom. Most of the certified TCI trainers at their conference in 2001 agreed on the following wording: “Respect is due to all living things in their growth and decay. This respect qualifies all evaluative decisions” (Vogel 2017, 230).

Röhling (2017) voices suspicion that violence and aggression could be supplanted in connection with the ethical orientation of the TCI approach. He suspects a false “ideal of freedom of aggression” in humanistic pedagogical concepts. However, the ethical axiom and the postulates stress the conscious recognition of violence and aggression in us, the goal not being to displace them, but to become aware of them and by choice take another course of action. In the context of the ethical axiom, Vogel (2017, 83) also refers to recent brain research presented by Bauer in particular (2009, 2011) whose findings indicate that, from the outset, people did not tend toward rivalry and competition, but toward cooperation, sympathy, and community. However, Vogel (2017, 59) also stresses that, in concrete decisions, the conscience (Wertesinn) does not react automatically: “[…] we are responsible not only to our conscience, but also for our conscience,
which may have to be (re)adjusted and (re)built over time.” Thus, the Wertesinn of Ruth C. Cohn also requires constant development. She stresses “that the Wertesinn, like all other abilities of the person, needs phased exercise and promotion to be able to develop and unfold” (Matzdorf & Cohn 1992, 62).

The second axiom is fraught with possible misunderstandings if it is (mis)used to support a blind course of growth, like we can find it in the neoliberal economy, which also influences higher education. Masschelein and Simons (2012, 13-40) criticize the European educational system with its tendency to capitalize all social relationships for the goal of producing an “ideal figure of the independent, enterprising student.” This is not only a critique of the European educational system but applies generally to tendencies emerging mainly from the northern hemisphere. The authors are afraid that Kant’s common imperative will be invoked as demanding service to one’s own mind without instructions for caring for one another. This attitude leads to education promoting global immunity instead of global responsibility. They therefore rephrase Kant’s imperative as follows: “Enterprising behavior represents the way out of self-imposed unproductiveness. Unproductiveness is the incapacity to live up to one’s own resources without being guided by others. This unproductiveness is self-imposed if its cause lies not in a lack of resources, but in a lack of determination and courage to enable one’s resources without the guidance of others! ‘Have the courage to partake of your own resources.’” (Masschelein & Simons ibid., 84f).

The importance of the ethical axiom for higher education lies not in repeating Ruth C. Cohn’s wording, but rather in its basic intention to respect the ethical aspects of human life and welfare. Without respect for ethical aspects, the chairperson postulate can revert to inhumanity. To prevent this from happening in all fields, but especially in education, was one of the Ruth C. Cohn’ most important goals.

**4.6 The Pragmatic-Political Axiom: Free Will Within Limitations**

In addition to the ethical axiom, yet another axiom pertains to the co-evolution of human beings between autonomy and interdependence on self-responsibility and self-assertiveness. It is the third, the so-called pragmatic-political axiom. This axiom is as follows:

Free will occurs within certain internal and external limitations, though these limitations may be extended. We judge freedom as given when we are healthy, intelligent, materially secure, and mentally mature; better than being sick, hampered, or poor and suffering from violence or a lack of maturity. Being aware of our universal interdependence is the basis of all humane responsibility (Cohn 2009, 120).
According to this axiom, we have the freedom to decide and to design our life independently. At the same time, the pragmatic-political axiom is realistic about the dream of unconditional freedom. The paradox of having not unconditional freedom but freedom conditioned by certain restrictions shapes the communicative reality of human existence. Both internal and external boundaries are at work in any situation. And yet such limits can be expanded. In this way, the historicity of human existence and human action once again becomes clearer. Humans are, therefore, responsible, precisely because they know about the universal conditions of freedom.

The TCI expert v. Kanitz sees the third axiom as a political and pragmatic answer to the Holocaust in the works of Ruth C. Cohn: “Both the cry ‘Never again’ and the prevention of such human-made catastrophes of all types are best effected by ensuring the power of value-driven consciousness, the ability of each and every individual to act and to assume responsibility” (v. Kanitz 2017, 84f.). Ruth C. Cohn’s friend, A. Farau, was convinced that a certain brand of existentialism supports the ongoing “Hitlerization.” Ruth C. Cohn saw the insights of existential philosophers more positively. “The courageous commitment to an uncertain existence could free up reserves and enable one to live life squarely grounded in one’s environment and together with other human beings” (v. Kanitz 2017, 85). Being grounded in human values and understanding social processes works against the kind of nihilism that leads to loneliness and alienation from others.

Being a human being does not mean just being thrown senselessly into the world; it means finding a meaning in life by realization of the individual self that is part of the community of all human beings [...] Humans can discover things, decide for themselves, consciously change the way the world is. This means both passion and burden, and leads to the important question: “How can I/we change things? What are my/our standards for deciding?” And that is what we call values (Farau & Cohn 1984, 444; transl. in von Kanitz 2017, 85f).

The question of whether a direct or indirect commitment to political action is to be derived from the pragmatic-political axiom has been controversially discussed in the TCI scene. Many authors (cf. Hoppe 1993, 1994; Johach 1994; Krämer 2001; Klemmer 2007) see the political component of TCI as underdeveloped or no longer cherished in accordance with Ruth C. Cohn’s legacy. They demand from TCI a higher level of social and political awareness, a demand that is often associated with criticism of Globe oblivio. The controversy surrounding the social criticism and political demands of TCI also relates to the question of where political action begins. Is the strengthening of an individual’s chairpersonship already political – or does TCI-compliant communication mean taking a stance on social policy discourse and actively working to change inhumane structures?

According to Reiser (cf. 2014) there is a “basic connection” between the first axiom of TCI and the so-called chairperson postulate. The second (ethical) and the third (political) axiom and the
so-called disturbance postulate “flank” this connection. Consequently, one of the central intentions of TCI in support of chairpersonship is flanked by basic human insights: The axioms possess a narrow connection to the chairperson postulate.

In light of the didactic intention of this book, I present the second postulate, the so-called disturbances postulate only at the end of this article because it is concerned about what can happen and what we can do if theme-centered interactional processes do not work as we want them to work.

### 5. Dealing with Living-learning Processes

The basic principles of TCI may be applied in many different areas. Here they are described in the context of learning and teaching.

#### 5.1 The Triangle in the Sphere

The best-known logo of TCI is the well-known triangle in the sphere or – because it is easier to graphically represent – the equilateral triangle surrounded by a circle touching it at all three corners.\(^85\)

![The TCI-symbol “triangle in a sphere”](image)

\(^85\) Reiser (cf. 2014) makes the case for using a tetrahedron because it allows the systemic correlation of all TCI aspects and factors to become more visible.
system. The TCI factors are continually being renewed in an ever-developing interplay, depending on where the respective learning group is currently moving (Belz 1988, 9-33). While the group is strongly involved in the It, attention is still drawn to the other factors, to the individual, the group/class, or the context (Globe) in which learning takes place. It is always important to consider all TCI factors and their dynamic balance in order achieve situational-appropriate planning of the learning processes. However, they also help to avoid a one-sided emphasis of the subject, the individual or the context in the course of learning processes and their evaluation.

In practice, realizing the very simple-sounding TCI working instrument requires a lot of attention to the participants in the learning process, to the dynamic evolving between them, to the existential meaning of the issue and to the ongoing attention for the Globe. All four factors are equivalent, so that both the material load of the learning process as well as the slippery slope into “soul striptease,” unproductive group dynamic or contextual issues must be avoided again and again. The art of living learning must be practiced; it needs continual reflection, if possible, with a supervisor.

The axioms and the postulates point out that individuality and communality share equal value in TCI; they are inseparably joined. Human beings do not live in isolation but are bound in an ongoing tradition of knowledge and wisdom – but also of inhumanity, cruelty, and indifference. They are called to make decisions and take responsibility in communicative interaction. In learning processes, not only here-and-now experiences are relevant, but also historicity, reaching both back into the past and oriented toward the future to preserve the sustainability of humanity and creation - as a whole. Human beings are co-responsible for the humanity or inhumanity of whatever topics and intentions are communicated. The respective concrete Globe is thus involved in all interactive processes (at least subconsciously) since no human being communicates in a social void. This context may be found in the German word “Bildung,” which links both personal and cultural maturation. Some researchers on higher education see a lack of “Bildung” especially in this field (cf. Miller & Ostertag 2017). The so-called Bologna Reform, with its orientation on standards and competences that can be evaluated on a quantitative level, in fact sometimes hinders learning processes. The concentration on learning processes as “generative themes,” which connects the educational theory of Freire and Ruth C. Cohn, can provide new alternatives (cf. Ostertag 2017; Hagleitner 1996). Generative themes lie nearer to people and their real problems. TCI encourages us to search for such uniting themes and to formulate them in adequate and attractive ways. Creating themes should become a task and competence inherent to higher education.

86 The Bologna Reform contains a series of agreements between European countries to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher-education qualifications.
The learning task receives its specific commitment not only through subjectification during living-learning processes. At school and university, communication often revolves around the “I” of individual students, the “We” of a group or class, or the “Globe” (context) in which they are currently active. But the “I,” the “We,” and the “Globe” can also become the subject of a learning process - in their own right. Because of the subjective, inter-subjective and contextual condition of all teaching and learning, it is useful to distinguish between the subject matter or the content being taught or learned, and the theme to which it is specific or which initiates learning. They are truly identical only if, for example, the topic of a book or an essay is understood as the content of a seminar or a school lesson.

In TCI, it has become customary to differentiate between the learning objective, the content or the concern of the learning processes and the respective theme. In the original texts by Ruth C. Cohn, the “It” as a learning subject, content or concern and the specific theme formulation are not completely distinguished, the It-factor being for all intents and purposes equated with the theme. Later though, TCI teachers differentiated more between It and theme. Figuratively speaking, the theme remained no longer settled beside the It, but forms the center of the triangle within the sphere (cf. Langmaack 2001). It equally refers to “I,” “We,” “It” and “Globe.”

For Padberg (2010, 73-84) TCI is at once a general didactic approach and more than that. He unites Klafki’s “critical-constructive didactic” (Klafki 2006, 13-34) with Reich’s systemic-constructivist pedagogy (1997) and TCI. In the so-called “didactic concept of Innsbruck” (Scharer 2000, 55-68; 2013b, 58-63), we use TCI not only for planning and evaluating learning processes, but also for the kind of didactic analysis Klafki promoted. Here, we work with a triangle in a sphere in which determination of the concern lies at the center.

When explaining the content of a learning project, I always think of a situation of a Czech colleague. She tried to understand what I meant by the term “concern” because she could not find an adequate word in her language. I provided some examples to explain it. Spontaneously, she said: Oh, now I did understand. “Concern” is what lies close to the heart of both you as a leader and the learning group - as a whole. So, when searching for the “concern,” which is always connected with specific intentions, it can be helpful to bring it to the center of the triangle in the sphere to discover the different aspects emanating out from the TCI perspectives. It is used like the term “perspective schema” Klafki employed to try to determine the central perspectives of learning. If the “concern” and the intentions are clear, someone can try to formulate a theme in the initial session of the process.

5.2 The Theme as the Focus of a Learning Process

In TCI, the theme is the focus of a living-learning process. It is also a specific tool for compassionate leadership in a given group. Understanding a deliberately formulated and
personally introduced TCI theme differs from the everyday usage of the topic concept, which usually refers only to contents or tasks without applying to the linguistic form a special learning-stimulating and communication-controlling meaning. Even in conventional didactic contexts, the topic is often equated with a summary of the matter or the content of a learning process. The TCI theme, however, is concerned with the particular focus of learning, which is not exhausted in the content-related exchange between students and lecturers.

The development of awareness for the theme is based on the practice Ruth C. Cohn introduced herself (Cohn 1970a, 251-259). In her seminars with very different groups, she invited people to recount what made them happy, what depressed them, with whom they did not work well, etc. From the act of attentively listening to the personal stories of people, the concrete theme – which had to be mapped out in each case – gained its succinct form: “I spoke to them as fellow seekers, who helped them to find their generative themes” (Cohn & Farau 2008, 334). The term “generative theme” refers to the TCI approach, too, especially their understanding of the subject, found in the liberating educational work of Paulo Freire (cf. Hagleitner 1996; Ostertag 2017). In the archive, I found documents showing the high interest Ruth C. Cohn had in Freire’s “Pedagogy of Liberation” (1975).

Many different themes are present in any meaningful communication between people. This is also the case in a living-learning process. If communication is not left to meaningless clichés, which kill the learning process, the theme-character of the topics remains. In this sense, Funke (cf. 1984) speaks of a “thematic-symbolic orientation” as crucial for the meaning among human beings. He sees TCI as a model of thematic-symbolic orientation which transforms experienced, often clichéd, everyday situations into meaningful social situations. Similarly, Kroeger (cf. 1973) in the first TCI book published in German, spoke of the fact that the process of searching and formulating themes according to TCI can be a process of “open language learning” which also focuses “on the right and strength of defense” (ibid., 214). The attention paid to the theme makes it possible to spontaneously grasp the central and existentially important issue, mostly in metaphors. Also, this act can unmask uninhibited educational talks as such. Attention to the theme and theme sensibility are helpful for understanding and formulating what is going on in living-learning processes. In my view, this is one of the most important tools in didactic training.

Themes sensu TCI create an association between the concerns of learning and the theme-centered interactional process in a concrete learning group. As proposed, it is important for didactics to first ask about the concerns of the respective learning process, which is a kind of didactic analysis: Where do the needs and concerns of the I, the We, the It and the Globe lie? To this end, it is necessary to gain general insights into (individual) psychology and sociology in order to obtain knowledge on individuals and on the Globe, in dynamics and group structures (cf. Rubner 2016) – and especially to have expert knowledge for determining the elementary

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87 In this case, it is an inner defense which crops up if terms or formulations are used that are usually undercover.
contents and structures of the subject. Therefore, formulating an adequate theme for a living-learning process in higher education demands a much higher competence with respect to the subject than that required in traditional “learning by repeating and summarizing” factual knowledge.

In accordance with didactic analysis, also of the TCI factors, determining the matter at hand and formulating an adequate theme become possible to evaluate the process. In the fourth edition of his book (cf. 41989), Kroeger worked out a model of self-supervision which can be useful for such an evaluation. He proposes reflection on the I, We, It and structure. In light of the argument stated above, I would add a report on the Globe and the theme. Such supervision can also be done in a group. In my TCI practice, such an evaluation, strongly oriented toward the theme, is a permanent tool for planning seminar sessions, to which I usually invite some participants. Also, I practice planning with participants who are interested in special learning. The feedback generally is that they have learned the most from the planning processes.

Up to now, we viewed the meaning of planning and evaluation and the specific possibilities present in themes. By formulating themes as the focus of a learning process, we need to ask: How can I “correctly” formulate themes? What are the rules of the game? Ruth Cohn (52007, 322f.) gave some helpful hints. An adequately formulated theme:

- is phrased briefly and clearly to be constantly kept in mind
- is not trite and therefore not boring
- is adapted to the linguistic and cognitive competences of participants
- is formulated so as not to exclude anyone or offend anyone’s feelings
- is not too narrowly (i.e., concretely) formulated so as to leave room for spontaneous insights, ideas and images
- is not too broadly (i.e., abstractly) formulated so as to not be open to “everything” and be focused on nothing
- has an emotionally challenging character (may contain group jargon, lyrical or punlike phrasing, reference to familiar events, and so forth)
- opens and favors new horizons and innovative solutions
- is not phrased one-sidedly, which leaves little room for other possibilities and thus may become manipulative
- does not go against the axiomatic values of human rights and of TCI
- supports the group process by fitting in, both logically and psychologically, with the sequence of themes to be worked through and by maintaining the dynamic balance between the participants’ concerns and concrete needs
- takes into account the ability of group members to express themselves verbally and makes use of nonverbal means of presenting themes (images, pantomime, etc.).
The theme as the focus of a learning process is not just the theme for the participants; it is also the theme for the leader/facilitator of the group. In this sense, one’s personal introduction to the theme is crucial. The use of pictorial material and games, occasionally also texts, may be particularly useful in some situations – not just for groups of children or handicapped persons. Such devices recommend themselves on a case-by-case basis. As a rule, however, the primary instrument of group work remains the well-phrased theme that has been carefully prepared to correspond to the group’s needs and to allow each participant to access it. Schneider-Landolf explains:

> The trick lies in finding a clear and precise description that engages the respective individuals with all their own experiences, knowledge, concerns, feelings, attitudes, fantasies, and questions; one that invites them to participate in the ensuing group conversation. That is how a lively process of exchange ensues among the participants: theme-centered interaction (Schneider-Landolf 2017, 147).

Finding, phrasing, and introducing themes requires considerable time, but the effort is well justified by the astonishing effectiveness it will have on the group’s interaction.

### 5.3 Structuring Learning Processes

The structuring of learning processes found in didactics was not the main concern of Ruth C. Cohn. Once you have carefully found, formulated, and introduced the theme, the structure for how to deal with it follows spontaneously. In the context of the professionalization of TCI as a method of leading groups, however, the question of adequate structures has become increasingly important. Structures understood as working forms, techniques (methods), and media, which are selected and applied from the theme, provide guidance and security in teaching and learning processes (Klein 2017, 154-158).

Putting theme at the middle of the triangle in the sphere also indicates that structuring the living-learning process grows directly out of the theme. In practice, teachers sometimes are so concentrated on finding the right forms of tasks, methods and media that they forget the theme as the focus of the learning process. Formulating a theme sensu TCI means finding ways to work on the theme, besides its meaning. The following figure explains:
The question of situating structures in learning processes in a globalized communication context, which is largely controlled by electronic media, raises problems that strongly challenge learning and teaching (cf. Scharer 2013; Scharer & Geffers 2015). If, for example, a very wide range of personal and intimate topics are communicated in a broad communication, this can affect the balance between autonomy and interdependence, proximity, and distance. The medium in which themes are communicated is associated closely with how trust is enabled (or not). In this context, the TCI triangle designed by Stollberg (1982, 40) can be helpful. It shows the interdependency of the triangle of process-structure-trust in the learning process:
Stollberg (ibid.) also describes what he calls implicit “shadow triangles”:

![Diagram of Interdependency of Stagnation – Chaos – Mistrust by Stollberg (1982, 40)](image)

**Fig. 4** Interdependency of stagnation – chaos – mistrust by Stollberg (1982, 40)

I have done a lot of supervision of learners and teachers in higher education. From this experience, I know about stagnation in planning and evaluating if everything is concentrated on the structure of a learning process. Mostly it is a lack of clarity about the subject matter and in the theme. Structuring processes based on a theme with a clear concern and clear intentions in mind make planning, facilitating, and evaluating learning processes much easier.

### 6. Participative Leadership in Living-Learning Groups

In my experience, participatory leadership that corresponds to the TCI approach is one of the greatest challenges for didactics in higher education. Establishing the ideal that students should be involved in the planning and facilitating of learning processes is much easier than actually installing participative leadership as a consequence at the university and college level. It changes the system and the role of all individuals involved.

Today we do not suffer from a hierarchical distribution of role preventing participative leadership. Nowadays – and not just in Europe – institutions of higher education are on their way toward becoming customer-friendly institutions (cf. Claassen 2017). But customers are also consumers and not participants in the sense of TCI. By trying to understand all the needs of students and to make each one of them happy with the bargain, I become like a supermarket attempting to bring products to the people. The products in this context would be the objectives students have. Participatory leadership, however, does not mean merely making objectives so attractive that students would want to consume them or pick them. This does not mean that it is not necessary to understand student’s needs and to make objectives learnable.
Switching to participative leadership in higher education means making it obvious to students that we are all a community of learners, albeit different competences we bring to the learning process. Teachers who are unaware that they too are learners – learning from the experiences and insights of their students – will be incapable of participatory leadership. I am so impressed by the many reports Ruth C. Cohn wrote in the context of her seminars. They are full of learning insights she gained before, during and after seminars which she wrote down carefully. They were (and still are) a major source of her knowledge. In her process of learning more about participation, she wrote some 3,500 letters, some of them more than 10 pages long, in order to get into a participative learning process with different people and researchers from different subject areas which interested her.

Leaders who favor participative leadership are aware of their own learning process as well as that of their participants. They encourage active involvement. “People can often express their creativity and demonstrate abilities and talents that would not become otherwise apparent. Discovering these hidden assets helps to benefit the work of the current team, but also alerts the organization to people within the team who should be provided with opportunities to further develop some skill or ability for further use” (Scharer 2017b) Participative leadership does not mean leading as the head of the learning group, as the directive leading style prefers. It also does not mean leading for a learning group, which is closer to the idea of satisfying customers. Rather, real participative leadership as a style means leading from within and is something that students and teachers rarely encounter in higher education.

Participative leadership has close connections to the authenticity of leaders and participants. For Ruth C. Cohn, selective authenticity as chairpersons is one of the main fruits of participative leadership. The selective authenticity practiced by the leader encourages participants to stand on their own and to selectively communicate their authenticity. This means that everything I communicate, both verbally and nonverbally, is authentic. Acting as a conscious chairperson, I decide what and how I communicate in the here-and-now. The practice of selective authenticity supports participants in mastering their own chairpersonship. Participative leadership also deals with disturbances and passionate involvements (see next section). So, participatory leaders are not far-off and unreachable teachers, big bosses, or famous masters; they are also not gurus, something Ruth C. Cohn strictly rejected for herself (cf. Cohn, 1992). Ruth C. Cohn never clearly defined participative leadership. For her […] group leaders are primarily participants, that is, human beings with their own specific interests, preferences, thoughts, and feelings. Only secondarily are they group leaders with a special function in the group. And this function is mainly concerned with maintaining a dynamic balance between the I, the We, the It and their connections to the Globe” (Cohn & Farau 2008, 368).
Hintner, Middelkoop and Wolf-Hollander (2017, 171) recently added the aspect of “balance between diagnostic distance and personal involvement.” They propose the following definition for participative leadership:

PL calls on leaders to be cognizant of their own conscious and unconscious actions and reactions by responding to the other participants and the entire process. They do this by selectively and authentically establishing a balance between diagnostic distance and personal involvement (Hintner, Middelkoop & Wolf-Hollander 2017, 171).

Participative leadership is one of the greatest challenges in higher education. It is not a tool someone can use like a magic wand to simply produce living learning. Rather, it presupposes a careful process of analysis and planning to determine what can happen in the learning group and how the leader is accepted as a person and not just as a leader. Questions of authority come into play. Selective authenticity helps to balance participation and provide the distance necessary to this role.

7. When It Doesn’t Work as It Should: Disturbances and Passionate Involvements in Living-Learning Processes

Especially when practicing didactics in higher education, the pressure rises to ensure that learning processes actually work. If they do not work in the ideal situations of classes at universities, polytechnics, and colleges, how should they be expected to work in the common practices of schools or elsewhere? Universities and colleges are generally fault-tolerant systems, so that the “disturbance postulate” of TCI might sound like a provocation. What does it mean? For Ruth C. Cohn, the term disturbance represented “one of the most important steps on the path from psychoanalysis to TCI” (Ockel & Cohn 1992, 185). It is formulated as the second TCI postulate:

… Note the hindrances along the way, both your own and those of others. Disturbances take precedence; failing to solve them prevents or delays growth (Cohn 1975, 121).

Or the more common formulation:

… Disturbances and passionate involvements take precedence (Cohn, 1975, 122).

For Ruth C. Cohn “disturbances do not ask for permission; they are simply there: pain, joy, fear, distraction” (Cohn, 1975, 122). She also speaks of “antipathies,” “perturbation,” “passionate feelings” and “involvements” (Cohn & Farau '2008, 359).
The disturbance postulate may sound paradoxical: How can disturbances and passionate involvements – highly emotional reactions with a somewhat unbalancing effect on people – in fact provide learning opportunities? Are they not in fact representing obstacles to working on a theme? For the content-oriented academic, calling attention to disturbances and passionate involvements may seem like an affront. TCI, however, encourages you to reconsider.

Yet one may ask: Doesn’t the emotionality of resistance and passionate involvement represent a force that is too little appreciated in traditional learning, teaching, and scholarship? When a specific theme, thought or feeling captivates me so much that I only outwardly participate in a learning process, then my interest is in fact occupied by the so-called disturbance. The “disturbing” concern becomes the real theme for me, what I am mainly concerned with. It comes to stand in competition with the ongoing process or topic. If this collision between themes is allowed to continue without being directly addressed, as is often the case in schools and universities, it leads to disinterest and indifference. If, on the other hand, there is an atmosphere in which disturbances and involvements can be “lived out,” there is the chance for a constructive solution. Here, the teacher too can learn something new, giving the topic more depth. Taking chances of inviting unexpected angles into the theme benefits all.

Sometimes it suffices simply to call attention to the existence of a disturbance, whereupon the participants can then return to the official theme. In other situations, it is necessary to decide collectively between the official theme and the latent themes of individual group members. Paralyzed communication is often rooted in the lack of clear perception of competing themes, which, because of the unconscious rule of the game, are prevented from finding expression. Laying them out on the table generally results in a heated discussion not without conflict. Whether and how decisions are made by the group about competing themes depends on the ability of the teacher/leader to deal with conflict, an ability that is intuitively perceived by the participants/students and must withstand the winds of group dynamics.

In such conflict situations, it is often helpful to recall the “official” theme as the original focal point of communication. The more precisely the official theme and the competing themes are formulated, the easier it becomes to identify resistance and alternative themes. If the competing themes prove so intense that continued working on the official theme becomes impossible, then it is necessary to re-plan the process. Perhaps also a synthesis becomes evident. Participants should be invited to take responsibility for their own and the common learning process. This means involving them in doing the re-planning. Rigid adherence to a plan set forth by curricular didactics is not what ensures the communicative quality of a learning process. Rather, clear planning combined with a flexible application is decisive. This means that the plan can be altered with the permission of the learning group if need be.
If disturbances and passionate involvements remain hidden or are suppressed and permanently left unspoken, there arises “the impersonal 'trouble-free' classrooms, lecture halls, factory rooms, conference rooms” (Cohn & Farau 2008, 359). They are

... then filled with apathetic and submissive or with desperate and rebellious people whose frustration leads to the destruction of themselves or their institution. The postulate that disturbances and passionate feelings take precedence means that we recognize the reality of man; and this contains the fact that our living, emotionally moving bodies and souls are the bearers of our thoughts and actions. When these carriers falter, our actions and thoughts are as uncertain as their foundations (Cohn 2009, 122).

It is precisely by recognizing the disturbance reality that we can create the possibility of changing this state and of bringing life and liveliness to higher education and learning. In TCI, the political and societal significance of the postulate of disturbance was revealed early on:

We believe that many of us fall victim to a disturbance in which we forget about what is humanly possible because we let ourselves be crippled by what is humanly impossible. Maybe this is our most important generative theme: “What do I do as an individual or as small group when confronted with the inscrutable factors that seem necessary for solving sociopolitical problems?” The disturbance says, “It is impossible, it is too much. We cannot find a solution for all the destructive, senseless, unjust things that are happening.

It is possible that this very way of phrasing the question causes such disturbances? … We believe that the disturbance (“it is too much, too complicated, too depressing to do something political”) may be countered with a policy of small steps and with the belief in human values (Ockel & Cohn 1992, 202).

As an example of the efficacy of the disturbance postulate, Ruth C. Cohn reports on a workshop she conducted the day after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. It initially gave room to the tragedy at hand, in which the participants were silently aware of the feelings and thoughts that moved them following the assassination. Then she formulated a theme that was consciously connected to the “external” disorder caused by the political events. From personal experience I can report something similar: I attended an unforgettable TCI seminar that took place during the Chernobyl disaster. Upon receiving the first news in the early days, the planned thematic orientation of the workshop changed radically. The experience of a young father whose children might have played in the sandbox the day before, because the child’s mother had not received yet the news of the accident, will forever remain with me. Since then I have become more aware of the resource of disturbances and involvements for “generative” themes. This example shows how
aspects of the Globe do not remain outside of a learning situation: Ever so often, “external” disturbances correspond to “internal” ones.

8. Summary

In this introductory chapter, I introduced the concept of TCI as discussed by Ruth C. Cohn and myself as author. Her explanations of certain aspects of the approach are supported by my own experiences in facilitating groups and classes in different fields of education, but especially in the context of higher education. Cross-cultural and trans-religious learning processes according to TCI have proved to be special challenges for me. I then correlated subjective experiences like those of Ruth C. Cohn with the numerous descriptions of TCI and its further developments available in the literature. Behind all of this stands my own work on the rich heritage of Ruth C. Cohn, which provides a deep connection between her “story” and the system of TCI so dear to my heart.

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From ICT To TCI: Communicative Theology(ies), Pedagogy And Web 2.0

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Introduction

Let me begin by noting that I am a Roman Catholic layperson who teaches full time in practical theology and religious education at a Lutheran seminary in the middle west of the U.S. The challenges that I face within theological education and the research that I do in the service of that arena are focused on the tensions and conflicting dynamics of religious experience and religious identity formation within media cultures. Perhaps my biggest professional challenge has to do with helping specific people to develop specific religious competence in a world of many religions and many cultures. Digital media make the definition of what “religious competence” is, complicated, and they also make it immediately obvious that Christianity is only one option amongst many.

While in the past it might have been possible in my context to believe that Christianity is the only true way to God, now we might venture that claim as an assertion, but it is clearly no longer a “given,” a way of life that is assumed and not questioned. Religious educators live, learn and lead in a world in which “dialogues in diversity” are at the core of our being, not simply a bumper sticker. There is no way to live in this world and not be aware that there are multiple religions. I would go several steps further: there is no legitimate way to be a Christian in the very specific communities within which I live and teach, and not know how to be a good dialogue partner with other people of faith from religions beyond Christianity. But what do I mean when I say that? Let me give you a concrete example.

Eboo Patel is the executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core, based in Chicago, Illinois. At a talk in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, he noted a headline – “Muslim extremist murders Christian pilgrim” – and pointed out that most people read that headline as Muslim | Christian. Patel believes that people need to start reading that line instead as extremist | pilgrim. “If we read the line Muslims against Christians” said Patel. “We are all going to be lost.”

Religious education – at least in my context – involves shaping people for community, introducing them to the ways of the community, and helping them to claim an identity within that community. Yet any such community is already embedded in multiple other communities. We speak, within my seminary, about helping our students to bridge the “Sunday/Monday divide” – by which we mean that religious practice needs to be about far more than Sunday morning worship. If, in that context, we educate for exclusive, extremist identity then we are creating major problems. If we educate for open, searching identity on the other hand – that of a pilgrim, a seeker on a journey – we are instead participating in God’s creation.
This shift in how we think about, prepare for, educate in, and nurture specific Christian identity is thus the focus of my work, and in this context I want to talk about how that process is embedded in media cultures, and how that embeddedness carries new opportunities, as well as old dilemmas.

1. ICT and Related Dynamics

Authority…

The first step in this story is to talk about some of the ways in which key elements of religious identity construction, of religious formation, are changing in the wake of the impact of new digital tools. Let me list just three: authority, authenticity, agency.

That ICT (internet communication technologies) contribute to a flattening of authority structures is a fairly straightforward claim, and one that has been echoed recently in a variety of publications. Perhaps the most vivid example I could share from within the U.S. Roman Catholic church can be found in Clay Shirky’s book *Here Comes Everybody*. In Chapter Six of that book, Shirky tells the story of two separate waves of outrage over child sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in Boston. In the first wave, in the early 1990’s, the outcry did not spread widely, and Cardinal Law – the presiding bishop at that time – could ignore it. By 2002, however, when the next wave of outrage erupted, new tools – online newspapers, email, and social networking to name just three – resulted in sustained and tangible opposition which eventually led to Cardinal Law leaving Boston for good. Shirky’s argument – one for which I could provide numerous additional examples from other contexts – describes the ways in which these digital tools flattened authority structures and created the possibility of coordinated opposition.\(^2\)

The Roman Catholic church is a hierarchical church, and its documentary polity means that digital tools can have authority-flattening effects as church documents are immediately made accessible throughout the world on the Net rather than gradually filtering from the Vatican to Bishops’ conferences to priests to laypeople. Similar stories can be told in other religious contexts. What is happening politically with young evangelicals in the U.S. would be another concrete example, where previous generations of evangelicals looked to the specific, almost charismatic authority of certain leaders, and now younger evangelicals are building a variety of looser, more organic institutions using web-based tools.\(^3\)
Authenticity…

These tools carry with them the authority of the environments within which they function, and much of that authority rests in what certain commentators have called the “authenticity of experience.” Contrary to some claims that the web is a disembodying context, David Weinberger notes: “What is the greatest betrayer of a lack of authenticity? A voice without affect, without passion: a computer program. The knowledge worth listening to – that is worth developing together – comes from bodies, for only bodies (as far as we can tell) are capable of passionate attention, and only embodied creatures, their brains and sinews swaddled in fat and covered with skin, can write the truth in a way worth reading. The bodiless Web is fat with embodied knowledge that could only come from the particular people – smart, wise, opinionated, funny, provocative, outrageous, interestingly wrong – to whom we are listening. Indeed, that’s why we’re listening.”

There is a growing recognition within various parts of the Christian community that this concern for authenticity, far from being a negligible or trivial claim is indeed one of the more pressing challenges facing churches. Ask a professor of Christian worship what constitutes authentic worship, and they will likely give you a nuanced and lengthy response, some significant portion of which will depend upon the appropriate and proper utilization of specific ritual elements. Ask a layperson what constitutes authentic worship, and you will elicit a vast array of responses, often the common element being some kind of affective dynamic. These are strikingly different understandings of what constitutes “authenticity” and in a world where authority must be built and embraced, rather than asserted and accepted, authenticity becomes a key element of that epistemological architecture. Finding ways to engage experience with both respect and critique – particularly the affective and physical elements of that experience – becomes a crucial task.

The further and further we venture into a world such as this one, with its multiple digital tools, many of which now found in miniature form in handheld devices such as the iPhone and other versions of mobile computing, the more people of faith within Christian contexts (and I would venture to speculate, other religious contexts as well), will desire, search for, and even need to find, ways to draw on and inscribe their authenticity using those tools. One key to that performance is to recognize the shared and participatory nature of cultural production.

Agency…

As Sheila Greeve Daveney notes: “‘the people’ are not just passive consumers of meaning, values, and practices devised by the powerful. They are the producers of culture on multiple levels, including through their resistance to elites, their creative appropriation and reconfiguration of the cultural productions of the powerful, and, not the least, through the creation of cultural meanings, practices and identities that are their own. In all this, popular
culture has emerged no longer as that to be disdained or overcome but as the domain of creative cultural contestation and construction.” It is this recognition of production and performance that has nourished a fertile new arena of theological study, that of practice-focused theology.

It is also the nub of the third element I’d lift up here, that of “agency” within religious practice. As a media literacy educator, I’ve learned over time that it is far more effective to have my students create and perform in various media – learning how to tell their own stories in digital video, for instance – than it is simply to critique commercial production. A primary element of that pedagogical effectiveness can be traced to the ways in which creation, production and performance of meaning embodies personal and collective agency so much more clearly and in multivalent ways than simply listening to, and by extension, accepting as adequate, verbal explanation. Religious educators who work with children know this deeply, but so, too, do religious educators who accompany adults on the complex and often doubt-filled journey of faith formation. It is not enough to support adults in broadening and deepening their grasp of specific theological doctrines, if in turn those doctrines are not also embodied in their daily lives.

Much of the “practices” literature is particularly compelling in its voicing of theological engagement with daily life within the U.S. context, but in a rather peculiar omission – given the widespread nature of engagement with media – it has often neglected to interrogate media culture practices. I suspect one reason for that neglect has been a nearly unanimous conclusion that media culture, specifically mass mediated forms of popular entertainment such as movies, television, radio shows, and so on, that media cultures are a hegemonic force of consumer commodification foisted upon passive audiences. As such there is no point in engaging them as anything other than something to be resisted. But that understanding of popular media cultures ignores the participatory nature of story-telling and story-sharing, not to mention nearly two decades of media studies research which underlines the complex and multifaceted way in which people make meaning with media. Passivity is the last word to be used in characterizing the nature of communicative practices within media cultures. For now, note that dynamics of authority, authenticity and agency are shifting amidst media cultures. In the next section of this paper I will argue that new digital tools make these dynamics at once more visible, and more amenable to cultural intervention.

Web 2.0 and Social Media

What is Web 2.0? What constitutes “social media?” The best description of social media that I know of is a little piece of video that describes them in terms of ice cream production and sales. In a print essay such as this I can only reference the video, but at the heart of its argument is the depiction of the impact of individual home ice cream makers on a village whose primary industry was an ice cream factory. The one factory dominated production, and in doing so produced only three flavors. The advent of individual home ice cream makers led to a flourishing
of different flavors, many of which only one or two people found palatable (think pickle ice cream), while other flavors found small and loyal markets. Eventually the townspeople discover ways to share their individual opinions on specific flavors, and new communities emerge around them, with membership shifting such that many people find themselves active in multiple, loosely joined affiliations. The video makes its argument using the example of ice cream, but it’s fairly easy for me to draw analogies to processes such as the creation and publication of religious curriculum materials – a central concern in my arena.

In the U.S. religious materials used to be produced by big, central church publishing houses – some of which still exist. Local churches were a kind of captive market, and purchased the materials produced by those institutions, whether or not the materials worked well locally, were in the languages necessary, represented people well, and so on. Now all of that has begun to change. Just about every church is creating their own materials to some extent, and recently new digital tools have made it possible for people to share them widely. Imagine the confusion and apprehension of the large publishing houses – most of which are arms of national denominations. How could these materials be theologically appropriate? How can local churches shun their officially approved materials in favor of others? And perhaps more deeply but more quietly, how will we survive if we no longer have a captive market?

On the one hand, these concerns could be heard/read as the concerns of a dying industry, particularly common to print publishing. But on the other hand, it has been the publishing arms of the national denominations that have traditionally supported religious educators in a variety of ways, not simply by writing curriculum, but also through training, networking, and other forms of institutional support. Increasingly a wide group of pastoral leaders (religious educators and pastors among them) are also raising questions about the theological and process content of locally produced materials. What kinds of options exist to mitigate or manage these concerns? Are there processes to reinscribe authority in ways that do not violate the authenticity or agency of local communities – and individual persons – but really engage and support them?

Similar kinds of issues were once raised by the advent of television, and at the time religious communities tended towards one of two responses: either to embrace wholeheartedly the new medium, simply “porting over” their existing content, or to work at “inoculating” people against content in the new medium. Think “Christian broadcasting” and “media literacy” (in their older forms). Neither response was particularly helpful in the long run, but both are still being tried today in relation to Web 2.0 media. Another option based more organically on the Web2.0 tools, however, is also emerging, namely, publishing/sharing sites such as FeAutor and MyCatholicVoice.

These sites take advantage of software that makes it possible for people to upload files easily, and then for others to find and download files. In other words, the process that used to be
managed via a variety of “file transfer protocols” requiring rather arcane knowledge of code, has continued to be streamlined in such a way that anyone who can find a file on their own computer and select it, can likely publish files using these sites, making the files available widely. Given the ease with which people can manage files in this way, a key question that emerges is: who will control what kinds of content are published in a given space? In other words, issues of authority become once again very relevant in architectural terms – that is, in the very structure of the coding of the site – as well as in more general terms. Different kinds of sites manage this question very differently. An early attempt to construct authority in a religious context through digital media was instituted at a site initially named GodTube, which at least in 2007, was the “fastest-growing new site on the web” in the U.S. context.13

While the site appeared to share a lot in common with YouTube, in many ways it was very different for it was actually a closed space with a specific set of theological commitments. Every contribution published there was first “vetted” by human beings, who applied an explicit theological policy. Indeed, part of its attraction as a “safe” space for Christians (a claim that featured prominently on the site at its inception) was that it was a space in which Christians did not need to encounter conflicting interpretations, plausible challenges to their identity, or pretty much anything else that might contradict a very specific understanding of Christianity. The site managed the issues of authority by implementing a direct theological statement, and a team of editors who ensured that any content published was congruent with that statement.

While GodTube grew very rapidly, it’s unclear whether such a process was sustainable in the rapidly changing landscape of people’s attention. GodTube morphed into something very different in 2009, re-naming itself Tangle, and limiting its terms of use statement to standard non-infringement claims. All the Christian theological claims were removed from its policies, with only the vague statement – “The Company will make commercially reasonable efforts to provide a safe, family-friendly environment for its Users” – remaining. At this point the site seems to be trying to move beyond the YouTube nature of its original inception, and instead become a portal for a variety of kinds of content, as well as social networking for Christian bands, groups, ministries and other organizations who participate in the ever shifting and expanding arena of “Christian publishing and entertainment.” Whether it succeeds or not will rest in part on the extent to which it can provide an experience whose authenticity and agency lends it sufficient authority to be credible in the communities the site seeks to serve.

Another attempt to build authority within this landscape grows out of a collaboration between several denominational publishing houses in the Roman Catholic context. The site MyCatholicVoice (www.mycatholicvoice.com/) is a joint venture of a number of Catholic publishers, with a distinguished advisory board. Much of the content on the site has been developed by these publishers and is made available digitally for sale for personal use. This site also encourages users to upload materials in a variety of formats, noting that any item uploaded
“will go through our review process to ensure it meets our Terms of Use,” although its terms of use statement is rather vague with respect to content claims. The site stresses that: “Our users expect our site to be safe - so MyCatholicVoice strives to provide an online environment that is safe and respectful. We welcome dialogue, discussion, and diverse points of view, yet require that users adhere to our terms of service and the policies reviewed and approved by our advisory board. And we have recently implemented our "From the Bishops" icon, so content from the Catholic Bishops is easily identifiable.”

It may well be that the site assumes people will be drawn to either the “From the Bishops” content, or commercial content, for such safety. While most of the current content on the site appears to be derived from these standard publishers, the site uses a variety of social tools (ratings, commenting, open uploads) to invite broader content creation. This site essentially relies on the established authority of hierarchical leaders and publishing houses to grant it credibility. It is a brand new site, so there is not much to document yet in terms of activity, but my hunch is that it will succeed or fail – again, like Tangle — based on the extent to which it provides opportunity for participants to exercise agency in ways that allow them to perform authentically. While each of these sites invites submission of materials from the public, one of the key attractional claims is that they are safe sites – a claim that suggests danger exists in confronting difference beyond the boundaries defined as “safe.”

Yet a third attempt to engage religious practice with Web 2.0 tools is that of FeAutor (www.feautor.org). FeAutor is a site that eschews talk of safety and prefers instead to empower its users with a wide assortment of reviewing, ranking, and tagging tools. It was created by a group of volunteers who connected via a World Council of Churches consultation on music and copyright, and it is a site that – at least for the moment – is completely free of commercial elements, with all content requiring the use of Creative Commons licenses. FeAutor is a relatively new site that few people have found and few are using yet (at last check, there were only 254 users registered, although people have registered to contribute to the site from 27 different countries). Like MyCatholicVoice, FeAutor accepts contributions in a variety of formats – video files, text files, PowerPoint files, audio files, software, and so on. Unlike MyCatholicVoice, FeAutor automatically publishes any contribution offered – reserving only the right to take down entries that violate specific laws. FeAutor also very explicitly attaches a Creative Commons license to each contribution published there.

On a spectrum bounded by closed content on one end, and widely open content on the other, Tangle might be at one end, MyCatholicVoice in the middle, and FeAutor at the opposite end. While in some ways these sites can be seen as similar, their architecture is actually quite different, with authority being built through a variety of mechanisms ranging from an active human review board, to publisher-edited content, to open reviewing and ranking mechanisms.
These are clearly structural decisions the sites’ creators have made, which are then implemented in the software coding. But they are also decisions that carry clear theological implications.

**Practice-focused Theology and Christian Identity**

Let me turn now to these implications, which I make not to assert that they are definitive or prescriptive for people beyond Christian community, but rather as an example of the ways in which Christian theology is challenged by digital technologies and can be renewed by them. Let me begin by noting that the most recent decade of Christian theological research has been particularly rich in the arena known as “practical theology” or the theology that grows out of, and is deeply embedded in, human practices. As Christian Scharen notes, this is a theology which must “develop, sustain and legitimize reflection on Christian faith not simply as a set of propositions to believe, commandments to obey, or rituals to perform, but as an orienting force that impacts every aspect of daily life.”

As such, practice-focused theology is particularly interested in the ways in which popular *practices* shed light on faith, and the God who draws human beings into relationship through faith. As noted early in this paper, however, this stream of theologies has *not* paid any kind of sustained or creative attention to the myriad ways in which people engaged mediated culture. Theologians who have focused on media have tended, until very recently, to emphasize negative aspects of mass mediated culture and to work with an understanding of media that is very instrumental. Thus, you have theologians and pastoral leaders condemning various kinds of popular culture, warning people away from some and steering them towards specific kinds of popular creativity. As Scharen notes, there have been frequent attempts to paint a “bold dividing line between the sinful world and the holy church, between saved persons and those who are lost.”

What such a bold dividing line has done, however, is underscore a specific theological position that is *not* so much that of mainstream Catholic or Lutheran theology, as just two examples. Here again Christian Scharen is instructive: “The view of sin such a position depends upon suggests that sin manifests itself in sinful acts, acts that a Christian does not commit because of the gift of grace. In order to seek a context in which one can live this new life of holiness, such Christians eschew the world and create their own subculture with versions of ‘worldly’ activities now baptized by explicit Christian values. One can easily see the whole world of contemporary Christian music as such a reaction: the baptized can still embrace the sound of electric guitars, but with wholesome lyrics that teach of Christ and his benefits. This view totters on the edge of making the claim, ‘You are saved by grace, now go and prove it.’ With this view comes the ever-present danger of ‘backsliding’ into the life of sin and the sinful acts that accompany it.”
Further: “The problem is that in this view, too much depends on our ability, and too little on the power of evil and of God. On the one hand, if sins are merely acts, we don’t take proper notice of the basic fault of human life that the Reformers of the 16th century called *incurvatus in se* or the self-curved in on itself. Misunderstanding the deeply sinful nature of our human existence then allows an overly optimistic sense of how easily such a fault can be overcome simply by trying to hide from bad things. On the other hand, if grace merely gives Christians the power to act rightly, then it limits grace to both a sort of shallow ‘motivation for doing good’ and to a help for Christians alone.”

Let me see if I can make this point even more clearly: the notion that we, as Christians, ought to be producing and living in Christian enclosures oriented to “safe” Christian materials not only denies a deeply Christian understanding of the sinful nature of human being itself – a sinfulness we confess Christ died to redeem us from – but it also denies the transcendence of God, and God’s very ability to create and transform the world. The move towards a Christian identity based on exclusivity, a move that all too easily becomes extremism, ultimately is a move that denies God, and God’s presence in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Christian Scharen again: “The idea is not that we simply baptize popular culture as filled with God; some of it is truly awful. Rather, we should simply trust that God’s grace is broad enough to be working in the world, in and through arts and culture, and our ability to see the depth present there should allow us to sit and listen fully, deeply, with a generous spirit. C. S. Lewis put it this way: ‘The first demand of any world of any art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way… Finding the connections between faith, art, and culture comes not from narrowing, but from expanding and deepening, our engagement with worlds beyond our own.’

This is why a site like *GodTube* had the potential, in its early incarnation, to be so pernicious, and a site like *FeAutor* holds out such hope. It is also why I made the claim at the beginning of this paper that the digital tools of a Web 2.0 world hold enormous potential for renewing and refreshing faith. If we can begin to trust that God is indeed active in Creation around us – and in creative activities amongst us – and if we can claim and articulate what we mean by such trust, we may indeed have a vital reason for pursuing theological inquiry in a Web 2.0 world.

Late in May of 2009, for example, Pope Benedict 16th released a statement for the celebration of the 43rd Day of World Communications. He noted, in part, that: “While the speed with which the new technologies have evolved in terms of their efficiency and reliability is rightly a source of wonder, their popularity with users should not surprise us, as they respond to a fundamental desire of people to communicate and to relate to each other. This desire for communication and friendship is rooted in our very nature as human beings and cannot be adequately understood as a response to technical innovations. In the light of the biblical message, it should be seen primarily
as a reflection of our participation in the communicative and unifying Love of God, who desires to make of all humanity one family. When we find ourselves drawn towards other people, when we want to know more about them and make ourselves known to them, we are responding to God’s call - a call that is imprinted in our nature as beings created in the image and likeness of God, the God of communication and communion.”

The Pope’s reminder of the essentially communicative nature of our relationship with God, and indeed of God within Godself, is also a key element of a river within theology that is being called “communicative theology.” In the remainder of this paper I will argue that communicative theology offers a particularly robust and compelling way to engage the shifting dynamics of “authority, authenticity and agency” so pronounced in new media cultures.

**TCI and Communicative Theology**

Communicative theology is a form of theology that begins from a clear affirmation that God is a Trinitarian God who is deeply relational and communicative in Godself. This is a claim that funds the theological position with tremendous authority, but at the same time opens room for engaging differing understandings of authenticity and agency. How so? To begin with, communicative theology argues that the process by which, or in which, one does theology is both intimately and integrally connected to the content and substance of that theology. The authors of a recent book on the topic write explicitly that it is “a method where the source of its assertions can be identified… there is a critical correlation between content and form in communicative theology, that is highly relevant to context as well…”

Let me take each piece in turn. From the standpoint of authority, communicative theology builds authority rather than simply assuming it can be asserted. As Scharer and Hilberath write, it is a movement from “assent” to “truth”, to recognizing that one is “entrusting oneself to God’s ‘communicatio’ and ‘communio.”

Perhaps an image might be useful here. Parker Palmer, who writes frequently about what is involved in this kind of obedience to truth, uses two images by way of contrast. The first depicts what he calls the “objectivist myth of learning”:

This image of knowing places an “expert” as the mediator between the object to be known, and the amateur knowers. Information flows in only one direction, and must go through this mediator. The baffles in the diagram make clear that communication is not even minimally dialogical, let alone deeply relational. This is an epistemological position that demands, at a minimum, “assent” to the authority of the expert. Palmer has a contrasting diagram, however, which he labels “the community of truth.” This image suggests, instead, that knowing is a process that is deeply relational, and that it requires a community within which one comes to know. It also names the center of the knowing as “subject” (vs. the “object” of the earlier
diagram), which already implies more agency on the part of the truth to be known, as well as the knowers.

Sometimes when I bring out this diagram to share with my students, they immediately object to it, since their first inference is that the “teacher” inhabits the role of “expert” in the initial diagram, but is somehow nowhere to be found in the second diagram. My counterclaim is that actually the expert in the first diagram may be the teacher – a model that is routinely in place in the academy – but there is no obvious reason why an expert must be adept at teaching and supporting learning. And in the second model, while the teacher may not be visible in a discrete position, the teacher might best be understood as the person and/or institution which shapes the learning space such that each knower remains in relationship with each other and with the subject at the center of their knowing.

It is this latter model – with each knower in relationship with each other and with the active subject – that best captures my understanding of how communicative theology attempts to function. In designing spaces or processes that work with this kind of theological engagement, communicative theology draws on the wisdom of a practice labeled “theme-centered interaction” or TCI. Theologians use TCI to structure a dynamic practice that: “moves from the I, the We, and the It to form a triangle encompassed in a Globe… the individual subjects – the “I” factor – participate in the We, and are oriented toward faith (It) as their response to the communication of God in the ambivalent situation marked by the Globe…”

It’s difficult to describe this process in print, for it is a dynamic exercise of moving amongst multiple positions of knowing. The “I” of the individual subject, for instance, is only one element of the process. Note the way in which this description builds authority out of a dynamic process of attending to often very disparate positionalities, while holding them together with respect for their specific integrities. The very process is itself communicative, and thus embodies the theological claims it makes. As Hilberath and Scharer note: “communicative theology can be understood as a process that directs its ‘gaze’ – in the sense of theological hermeneutics – toward the communication event… [it is] shared and participatory…”

To borrow a very old slogan – “the process is the goal.” And in so doing, the process invites experience to build authority. But the experience is not simply un-reflected or individual experience, it is, instead, shared, dialogical, relational experience built from the movement amongst these differing positionalities. There is attention paid, for instance, to what it requires to “be one’s own chairperson” – a phrase which captures the significant degree to which people participating in a theme-centered interaction are asked to be mindful and sufficiently self-differentiated to engage in a shared process. How often, by way of contrast, do small group discussions in a classroom become simply naïve renderings of opinion, defensive posturing, or some other form of performance rather than deep engagement with the subject at hand? Here
again, Palmer’s diagram is useful because it points to the necessity of keeping the subject in focus. There is much which speaks to “authenticity” in learning here, but it is not simple or unreflective experience. As the Scharer and Hilberath write: “TCI advocates the notion of “selective authenticity.” The rule of communication is “as authentic as possible and as selective as necessary.” In communication, according to TCI, it is important to develop a feeling for authentic self-expression appropriate to a given situation. Only someone who can communicate while holding inner and outer factors “in balance” is in a position to protect him-or-herself and others from an inappropriate “soul striptease” on the one hand and from a defensive distance keeping on the other.”

There are multiple ways in which digital tools and, more specifically, the kinds of software that make possible what we are calling “Web 2.0,” allow this kind of selective authenticity to be visibly embodied. A review and ranking system, for instance, like the one built into FeAutor, both invites people to share as they feel appropriate and yet also invites the community to read across time to determine which criteria ought to become most pertinent. This is not, however, a process that promotes safety through instrumental or transmissive means. Indeed, one key claim that communicative theologians make is that: “the processes shaped towards eliciting and identifying this revelation must, of necessity, be open, communicative, and oriented towards the borders, the edges, the spaces in which disturbance, perplexity and conflict arise…”

This emphasis on engaging truth in the very heart of perplexity and conflict is an ancient art whose practice we have almost lost in the either/either/or dichotomies of much current cultural practice. It is most assuredly not a practice which flourishes where concern for safety predominates.

Of course, there are ways to use materials found at a closely controlled site like GodTube was, to open people up, to expand and deepen engagement with worlds beyond our own. And no doubt there are ways to use materials from the FeAutor site to opposite effect. That is why the final element of my argument – that of agency – becomes so crucial.

As communicative theologians argue, the very ways in which we look, in which we listen, in which we receive, in which we “get ourselves out of the way” – to use C. S. Lewis’s words – are constitutive of theology. If we are to live into the 21st world of digital technologies in ways that live and breathe and move with God, we must do so theologically. And we must do so fully engaging dialogue and diversity.

Christianity can be understood as a practice of living into paradox (“baptized into death,” and so on) at the edges, rather than in the smoothed over middle or the artificial polarities of the ends. Indeed, as H. Anderson and E. Foley write: “The spirit of reconciliation, which enables us to enter a world of contradiction, is the same disposition that allows us to embrace paradox without
needing to resolve it. This is a spirituality that thrives only in paradox, between the mythic and the parabolic, around the human and divine story, and in the tension of the individual and communal. It is a spirituality that is nourished by the ambiguity of mighty stories and dangerous rituals. This experience of ambiguity is inevitable because pluralistic living is a permanent part of contemporary human society. If we are to flourish in this society, we need to learn how to tolerate opposing forces, both within and without.”

How does one articulate a process, let alone a pedagogy, for living in this kind of paradox? I believe that communicative theologians offer us a pragmatic path for doing so. There is far more that could – and should – be said about the process of communicative theology. While these theologians are articulating a very specific way of doing theology that relies on theme-centered interaction, their underlying assumptions have resonance with a number of differing theologies over the years and around the globe.

As long as my students – who, it is important to note, are training to be pastors and lay pastoral leaders – stay caught up in images of theological and religious education that are bound into transmissive notions of teaching and learning, that privilege hierarchically structured notions of authority, and passive accounts of learning, as long as they seek to create “safe” Christian spaces for their youth to inhabit, rather than imagining what is possible through collaboration and participation, they can’t quite “get” what communicative theology is about. But consider the kinds of interactions that spaces such as FeAutor, as just one example, makes possible.

Here is a space where people are free to share, invited and welcomed even, to share their creative articulations of where and how and why they are finding God. They are invited to listen to and to look at other articulations, and, in doing so, to tag and review them, thus participating in a larger conversation. Users of the site can bookmark their favorites using social bookmarking services with which they are familiar in other contexts, and they can “listen in,” even apprentice to, other guides. They can lurk on the site, observing the “edges” if you will, and then they can dive in and publish their creations in those spaces.

I have no idea if this particular space will “catch on” enough to be popular, but its very architecture conveys something of the religious commitments of the people who created it. FeAutor says that it is a “free, multilingual and open space to share religious resources.” It does not specify further what any of those terms mean. The people who created, and to date have populated, the site with content, are Christians, but the site in no way assumes that one must be a Christian to use it, or that the content published there is Christian. In sharp contrast to MyCatholicVoice, the original GodTube, and other similar services, there is no up-front editorial board eyeing every contribution to determine if it matches the theological norms of the site. Instead, anyone can publish there, and the minute a contribution is received it is publicly available. At the same time, however, there are very clear theological commitments that led to
its creation – commitments articulated in the recent document *Love to Share: Intellectual Property Rights, Copyright and Christian Churches* which came out of the World Council of Churches.\(^{34}\)

At the beginning of this essay I noted the following quotation from David Weinberger, a thoroughly secular philosopher of the web: “What is the greatest betrayer of a lack of authenticity? A voice without affect, without passion: a computer program. The knowledge worth listening to – that is worth developing together – comes from bodies, for only bodies (as far as we can tell) are capable of passionate attention, and only embodied creatures, their brains and sinews swaddled in fat and covered with skin, can write the truth in a way worth reading. The bodiless Web is fat with embodied knowledge that could only come from the particular people – smart, wise, opinionated, funny, provocative, outrageous, interestingly wrong – to whom we’re listening. Indeed, that’s why we’re listening.”\(^{35}\)

There is a greater claim embedded in such a statement that a communicative theologian could lift up – that is, that the only theology worth attending to is that worth developing together in these bodies which are capable of passionate attention and which are embodied through the creative gift of God, who grants us our creaturely selves.

Web 2.0 tools now make the possibility of such development more globally accessible and do so in ways unimaginable just a few short years ago. Rather than vitiating our Christian truth claims by hiding in so-called “safe” spaces that render us vulnerable to extremism, we need to move outward as pilgrims on a search for God in the midst of communities and communication, in the midst of differences and tensions, seeking amidst the dynamic dance of the I and the We, the IT which we confess, all the while conscious of the globe in which we dance. Communicative theology, participatory social media – these two rivers come together in a vivid way that make this kind of dynamic dance not only possible, but easily present and available.

**Endnotes**


5 Let me note that when I use the terminology “the Christian community” it is more for convenience than anything else, as there are a vast array of Christian communities, many of whom would not necessarily recognize each other as being part of the same community, no matter how broadly construed.

6 This kind of participatory engagement may be one element behind the spread of Twitter, where even some pastors are encouraging the use of the digital text service in the midst of worship, see: [http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1895463,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1895463,00.html) (status: June 4, 2009).


8 I am referring here, in particular, to the work begun under the aegis of the Practicing Faith movement led by Dorothy Bass, but perhaps the wider work of organizations such as the Association of Practical Theology would be another example.


10 The video is entitled “Social Media in Plain English” and is produced by Common Craft. It is available via their website: [http://www.commoncraft.com/socialmedia](http://www.commoncraft.com/socialmedia) (status: June 4, 2009).

11 See, for example, HESS, MARY, From trucks carrying messages to ritualized identities: Implications of the postmodern paradigm shift in media studies for religious educators, Religious Education 94/3 (1999) 273-288.


13 As reported by comScore (see: [http://www.physorg.com/news113153071.html](http://www.physorg.com/news113153071.html), 11/1/07, status: June 4, 2009). Such designations are notoriously unreliable, as web metrics are still being figured out. Nevertheless, this site clearly was growing rapidly enough that various news organizations were taking note.
14 This quotation is taken from the “about us” segment of the site (accessed June 3, 2009): http://www.mycatholicvoice.com/info/about.

15 Let me note, by way of disclaimer, that I have been very involved with the group of volunteers across the Americas that are developing FeAutor.

16 *Creative Commons* licenses are legal licenses that function within existing copyright regimes, while automatically granting certain kinds of uses. They exist in a variety of formulations along the spectrum between “all rights reserved” (what we traditionally have understood as copyright) and the public domain (where no rights are reserved). They are clearly embodying the practices of Web 2.0 spaces most directly, but again – will it provide the kind of opportunity people are seeking? Can a religious space that is wide open, with peer ranking and other egalitarian authority mechanisms, feel sufficiently authentic to be credible?

17 For more on the ways in which software architecture structures a site’s functionality see LAWRENCE LESSIG’s *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*. Available in an online, revised version here: http://codev2.cc/ (status: June 4, 2009).


19 SCHAREN, Faith as a Way of Life, 102.

20 SCHAREN, Faith as a Way of Life, 102-103.

21 SCHAREN, Faith as a Way of Life, 103

22 SCHAREN, Faith as a Way of Life, 104-105.


25 SCHARER / HILBERATH, The Practice of Communicative Theology, 75.
This figure, and the following, are taken from PALMER, PARKER, The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life, San Francisco 1998, 102-106.

SCHARER / HILBERATH, The Practice of Communicative Theology, 92


SCHARER / HILBERATH, The Practice of Communicative Theology, 160.

SCHARER / HILBERATH, The Practice of Communicative Theology, 155-156.


BRADFORD E. HINZE, in his introduction to the book to The Practice of Communicative Theology, outlines a number of theologians whose work has resonance here. I would add the recent work of Jolyon Mitchell in the field of media studies and Christian Ethics to that list.

The only exception to that rule are the pieces that are published through groups, where the group exercises editorial control over what goes up in its name (groups like Red Crearte, for instance, which has a space on the site).

This document is available online at: http://www.feauthor.org/id/12060144352 (status: June 4, 2009).

WEINBERGER, Small Pieces Loosely Joined, 145.
Theme-Centered Interaction: Intersections With Reflective Practice In North American Religious Contexts

By Mary E. Hess, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota

Abstract

A variety of efforts in North America include frameworks for helping participants in learning events to listen more carefully, to attend more reflectively, and to speak more slowly. Here is an important intersection in which the work of theme-centered interaction (TCI), Ruth C. Cohn’s psychologically grounded and astute theorizing and practice, offers substantial affirmation of specific processes. There are clear resonances between strategies such as “being your own chairperson” and “knowing your theory-in-use.” Reflective teaching practices support putting learning at the heart of higher education, rather than too narrowly falling into teaching-focused interaction.

1. Our Current Context

It is difficult to overstate how tumultuous and confusing our experiences of the world are today, at least in the so-called advanced democracies. Amid the turmoil and complexity of global shifts in telecommunication, pressing environmental challenges, and massive refugee movements spawned by violent conflicts, the very nature of higher education is being fundamentally questioned.

I would point to three shifts in particular that are shaping our experience as designers and facilitators of learning experiences in these spaces: what constitutes authority, how authenticity is defined, and how personal and collective forms of agency are experienced (cf. Hess 2016). In these shifts, the central narratives of higher education are fundamentally being challenged. Is this form of learning primarily aimed at preparing young people for paid employment? Is it a space in which basic research is pursued for the development of more effective solutions to pressing issues? Is it an arena for sustaining memory over time, particularly of history? Is it a liminal space in which people of all ages come to retool and enter new forms of activity? Perhaps it is all this and more besides (cf. Richardson and Dixon 2017).

Clayton Christenson, who in many ways has been the spokesperson of disruptive innovation, notes that the university of today and tomorrow may well be the one that best manages three tasks – discovery, memory, and mentoring (cf. Christensen and Eyring 2011). In that phrase you can identify all the various goals I noted earlier.
While I generally agree with these analyses, I would point to a particularly urgent challenge that is readily apparent in the contexts in which I teach – that is, in North America. I want to start there, not so much because I believe I have diagnoses and prescriptions which are pertinent beyond these contexts, but because I believe that engaging a very specific context can prove evocative for others, it can be a starting point for dialogue and engagement.

2. Competing Epistemologies

At the heart of theme-centered interaction, at least as I understand it, is a deep commitment to, and recognition of, a dialogical form of knowing, an epistemological assertion, if you will, that we inhabit what Parker Palmer has called a “community of truth” (Palmer 2007, 100–107). Such an assertion recognizes that each of us has an authentic and valid experience of the world and no one experience can ever encompass all of reality. Further, to gain a solid grasp of the reality which we inhabit, we must find appropriate and effective ways to “pivot our standpoints,” to “shift our perspectives,” and to enter into spaces constructed so as to collaborate through difference (cf. Collins 2009; Bruffee 1993). Perhaps a shorthand way of framing this assertion would be that the more diverse the knowers, the more robust the knowing.

Such a way of viewing the world is not easily arrived at, and far too many of our default practices in higher education shy away from such a stance. Note, for instance, how strongly polarized our current spaces have become or how “tribal,” to use Jonathan Haidt’s term, much public discourse has been (cf. Haidt 2012). Maria Popova makes an interesting point here, when she notes that in social media-driven spaces, the “biggest social sin is not to have an opinion,” no matter how little experience or knowledge one has of a specific issue (Popova 2014, timemark 3:44).

Even within academic settings, at least within the United States, there is still a strong default assumption embedded in the structures of higher education that privileges expertise arrived at through focused and narrow individualized research. The strongest resistance to such an epistemological stance can be found in the various fields of science, but, as most people are aware, there is strong ideological pressure right now in the United States to resist scientific forms of inquiry, and the funding and other structural support for such inquiry are dwindling rapidly. Indeed, much of the funding for higher education in the United States is increasingly being tied to a narrow push for “job readiness,” for patterns of knowing that have narrow goals of helping students to “get a job” (cf. Pellegrino and Hilton 2012).

2.1 Authority, Authenticity, and Agency

To some extent these default assumptions are being challenged by shifting dynamics amidst the influx of digital technologies. Media scholars note, for instance, that when authority is no longer
conferred, let alone accepted, through structural means – such as conferring authority on the professor standing in front of a room simply because they are the professor – credibility becomes something which must be built anew in each setting, it must be crafted and demonstrated and deliberately shaped (cf. Hess 2015).

Similarly, what constitutes “authenticity” changes from moment to moment. Whole industries – entertainment, marketing, etc. – are built on figuring out what signals authenticity and then selling the tools and processes to produce such signals to the industries which rely on consumerism. For many of the students with whom I teach and learn, “authenticity” is the opposite of “manipulation” – and manipulation is a facet of nearly every experience they encounter, certainly in public or civic settings. These students have very highly tuned “bullshit detectors” – but their detectors rely on emotional clues and are often bound into hegemonic cultural forces which have blinded them to structural racism or, in the case of my students who are from marginalized or minoritized communities, have caused them to internalize the messages in damaging ways.

The final dynamic – that of agency – has been thoroughly shaped in U.S. contexts into agency experienced primarily, or even solely, through consumption. There are vanishingly few forms of collective agency in robust evidence in the United States right now. Labor unions have nearly disappeared, political action has been deformed into consumption of candidates packaged for particular constituencies to whom one can “donate” funds (so consumption through “purchase” of a candidate), and even the emerging rise of large rallies – the women’s rally immediately following President Trump’s inauguration, for instance – is, should be, are, moments of visible presence which are experienced as brief glimpses of shared energy rather than sustained and collective building of structural resistance.

Propaganda is increasingly the dominant form of public discourse, and in the U.S. media sphere, where news media have to produce profit in order to function, and even the so-called public media are dependent on corporate largesse, persons must work hard and intentionally to find and filter actionable information from the firehose pressure of data that is constantly being streamed to them (cf. Hobbs 2017). Perhaps there is some resonance here, or worthwhile analogies to be drawn, between the era in which Ruth Cohen developed theme-centered interaction and our own. Certainly, her work has some specific implications for and relevance to higher education in the United States.

3. Intersections with TCI

I need to be clear in this essay: as someone who teaches and does research in the North American context, my experiences with TCI have been quite limited. I first encountered the methodology in the work of communicative theologians Matthias Scharer and Jochen Bernd Hilberath, and,
even then, it was primarily through the translation work and efforts of Catholic theologians Mary Ann Hinsdale and Brad Hinze (cf. Scharer and Hilberath 2008).

These four scholars led a team of Catholic theologians through an exercise in communicative theology at Fordham University in 2008. I was energized and inspired by that process and since then have been following the ideas and literature to the extent that I can in my own contexts. I am on the faculty of a Lutheran graduate theological school in the upper Midwest of the United States. I also teach in various other Catholic contexts (Seattle University, the University of St. Michael’s College in the University of Toronto, and so on).

In these spaces, without ease of access to TCI trained facilitators, I have found analogous and resonant work in a number of other scholars, and in the rest of this essay, I will endeavor to note several of the more interesting intersecting points in this work. I will use the points on the TCI diagram as my organizing structure.

3.1. The Globe

Let me begin with the notion of “globe” in which this work takes place. There is strong consensus amongst theologians that context matters (cf. Bevans 2004). Yet, as anthropologist Michael Wesch has demonstrated, we are inhabiting a world in which context has collapsed (cf. Wesch 2009). When video, audio, or even simply Twitter texts, which arise in one setting, can be floated on a vast sea of data and come to rest in another setting minus any of their original context, it is more imperative than ever that we focus intentionally on the “globe” in which meaning is produced, in which it circulates, and how, if at all, we contest or negotiate with it (cf. Zuckerman 2013; Rheingold 2012). There are very few boundaries or borders any longer which mark, let alone obstruct, the flow of certain kinds of data.

For some organizations – certainly, those who rely on capital flows – this lack of border or boundary can be a boon. But for most of us, this liquidity can be problematic and even profoundly destructive (cf. Hylén 2015). Consider the challenges that arise around privacy norms, which vary by country to country, and yet which businesses like Google and Facebook regularly flout (cf. Rainey and Wellman 2012). Even financial capital is flowing without marker given the emergence of technologies like Bitcoin. How are we to understand let alone influence such flows? A first step might well be finding ways to intentionally, systematically, and thoroughly, keep recognition of “the globe” in our awareness. Theme-centered interaction invites that recognition, as does Parker Palmer’s “community of truth” framework (Palmer 2007, 100–107).

In the upper Midwest of the United States, where I live, teach, and work, there is a set of practices which has proven profoundly energizing, as well as empowering, in myriad contexts. I
say “practices” to describe the Art of Hosting in the same way that I speak of the “practices” of yoga, rather than a specific form of yoga. The Art of Hosting is, as one popular website notes, “an approach to leadership that scales up from the personal to the Systemic, using personal practice, dialogue, facilitation, and the co-creation of innovation to address complex challenges” (cf. ArtOfHosting.org ). The University of Minnesota, for instance, an R1 university with more than 50,000 students, has staff that work through a Center for Integrative Leadership on the Art of Hosting as a form of participatory leadership. They have published a guide to cultivating this kind of change in this sector of higher education and regularly host workshops and seminars for faculty, students, and staff, as well as other local constituencies (cf. Lundquist et al. 2013).

The Art of Hosting is specifically concerned with how to convene, facilitate, and harvest conversations that bring together people from disparate cultures, backgrounds, and contexts. It has spread throughout the world and now has practitioners who lead and train facilitators in many countries. A glance at one of the websites notes trainings taking place in Greece, Croatia, India, Australia, Belgium, Chile, Brazil, Switzerland, France, Austria, the United States, and so on. (http://www.artofhosting.org). Like TCI, these practitioners work on structuring conversations in ways that draw on a way of knowing that is thoroughly participatory.

3.2 The I

Another key intersecting point is the recognition Ruth Cohen brought to the necessity of supporting individual, personal awareness of one’s own interactions and embeddedness in discourse. This insight has long been a key element of many of the tools used within a variety of conversational practices focused within public conversation. Two have been particularly important in the theological contexts in which I work.

The notion of “being your own chairperson” can be supported through learning the difference between an “espoused theory” and a “theory-in-use.” Anita Farber-Roberston draws on the work of Chris Argyris to note that an “espoused theory” is what we say we do and what we think we are doing. She contrasts that to a “theory-in-use,” which is a theory that “explains the actual behavior we have produced, even though we have not expressed it verbally” (Farber-Roberston 2000, 5). An espoused theory is often what we aspire to, and it offers a narrative, a way of perceiving what we are feeling, which privileges our own internal self-story while submerging awareness of another person’s. People who are familiar with the language of nonviolent communication will note the distinction between an “observation” and an “evaluation” (Latini and Hunsinger 2013, 62).

An observation might be that someone has a furrowed brow, which could move to an evaluation that they were angry. But that same observation might be evaluated as concentration. How do we move from “directly observable data” beyond an “inferred meaning” to an “actual meaning?”
Farber-Robertson offers a number of possible tools, and these are, in part, the kinds of practices that Cohen recommends, when describing what it means to “be your own chairperson.”

Another useful framework comes from the work of Lisa Laskow Lahey and Robert Kegan (2001). They have compiled several different “languages” for becoming reflective of, and intentional about, one’s self. Four of these “languages” they describe as “internal” or primarily directed to one’s self-engagement. To wit:

- Moving from a language of complaint to commitment (13–32):
  - Moving from a language of blame to one of personal responsibility (33–46)
  - Moving from a language of “new year’s resolutions” to one of competing commitments (47–66)
  - Moving from a language of “big assumptions that hold us” to one of assumptions we hold (67–88)

In each of these shifts, Kegan and Lahey (2001) offer ways to move from the narrative overlay of behavior from a narrowly focused individualist, and what Kegan would define as “third-order form of knowing,” to a frame which invites reflective practice which is grounded in community. A “language of complaint,” for instance, emphasizes specific wounds, injuries, microaggressions, and so on. The shift to a “language of commitment,” which identifies the underlying norms which have been transgressed or harmed, deepens and strengthens, relationality. This shift has several very important and constructive implications for working with students in higher education contexts and sheds further light on why “being your own chairperson” is such an essential practice (Kegan and Lahey 2001, 13–32). In the midst of turmoil over racial incidents, fears about immigration, concerns about difference, and so on, inviting students to reflect upon the hurts they experience as pointing to underlying commitments can transform the discursive terrain from one of focusing on the hurt – which often magnifies it, evokes debate about whether it is “real” or not, and can stimulate too quickly moving to “fix” something – to focusing on seeking to draw out shared norms of communal respect and mutual accountability. As Kegan and Lahey note, this language does not deny the harm, nor does it seek to minimize or excuse it, but rather, deepens mutual accountability.

So, too Kegan and Lahey’s discussion of moving from “a language of blame” to one of “personal responsibility” (ibid. 33–46): here there is a clear recognition that truth telling is essential, but the truth being told is intimately bound into relationship. The narrative overlay deepens that relationship, rather than contributing to dynamics which promote “othering” or processes which further split and divide people. There is much more in their theoretical and research-based work to explore, but the two points I want to make here include noting the similarities to TCI and...
emphasizing that Ruth Cohen’s insight about the power of “being your own chairperson” can fruitfully be employed in higher education classrooms.

3.3 The We

Context collapse (the globe) and personal reflection (I) – both must also flow into how it is that we engage notions of group identity, or “we.” In the U.S. context, particularly in higher education, there is increasing recognition of the need to support students who have been externally identified by group into racial, sexual, class, or other oppressive dynamics, as well as developing affinity groups which students choose to belong to as a way of finding support and belonging in the midst of these very painful dynamics. Thoroughly permeating all of these groupings, however begun, is also the pervasive and almost subliminal grouping which is deliberately engineered by neoliberal ideologies which seek to “market” consumption to ever more narrowly defined “target markets” (cf. Brown 2015).

How do we learn and explore, discover, and mentor, in such dynamics? Ruth Cohen’s emphasis that one of the nodes of dialogical/relational forms of knowing is the “we” – the group – is a key insight. Here again Kegan and Lahey (2001) have offered helpful insights suggesting that we need to move:

- From the language of prizes and praising to the language of high regard (89–91)
- From the language of rules and policies to the language of public agreement (103–120)
- From the language of constructive criticism to deconstructive criticism (121–145)

Each of these shifts resonates strongly with Cohen’s discussion of “we,” but let me focus on the final one because the terminology might be somewhat off-putting. Many teachers in higher education contexts are familiar with “constructive criticism,” that is, with offering feedback on student work which highlights what might be changed to be more effective, more appropriate, more insightful, and so on. The intention of such criticism is to support growth and learning. Such feedback, however, often reinforces that the giver of the feedback is the expert knower and that there is a “right” answer. Of course, in matters grammatical or otherwise factual, there is a right or a wrong answer, an appropriate or an inappropriate element. But in far too many of our learning contexts, particularly those in which we are seeking to support reflective and/or transformative learning, there is much more interpretation involved, and the potential for conflict that submerges or silences learning is high.

Kegan and Lahey offer a set of what they term “deconstructive propositions” which ground this shift in a more relational and dialogical epistemological foundation:

- There is probable merit to my perspective.
• My perspective may not be accurate.

• There is some coherence, if not merit, to the other person’s perspective.

• There may be more than one legitimate interpretation.

• The other person’s view of my viewpoint is important information to my assessing whether I am right or identifying what merit there is to my view.

• Our conflict may be the result of the separate commitments each of us holds, including commitments we are not always aware we hold.

• Both of us have something to learn from the conversation.

• We need to have two-way conversation to learn from each other.

• If contradictions can be a source of our learning, then we can come to engage not only internal contradictions as a source of learning, but interpersonal contradictions (i.e., “conflict”) as well.

• The goal of our conversation is for each of us to learn more about ourselves and the other as meaning makers. (Kegan and Lahey 2001, 141).

These propositions can feel quite uncomfortable to faculty who are used to premising their authority on their position as a professor or their role in an academic discipline as an expert. But even experts – perhaps particularly experts in this postmodern world we inhabit – can be open to new insight, new perspectival grounding, and new ways of engaging specific content. I hope readers can sense the resonance between this approach, and Ruth Cohen’s commitment to having “we” be one element, one node, in the dialogical dance of knowing which Parker Palmer has labelled the “community of truth.”

3.4 The It or Theme

The final node in the TCI dynamic is that of the “it” or the overall “theme” which focuses the work. I have less to say about this node, even though for many TCI practitioners, it is perhaps the most important, the “theme” of theme-centered interaction. I have less to say in part because in the settings in which I work, the “it” has the further complication of being the “logos,” the “Word,” “divine revelation,” and so on. That is to say, in theological contexts the “it” takes on an element of revelation which speaks to transcendence breaking into human knowing. The “it,” at
least as I have encountered this work through communicative theology, is the node in which God’s active communication is engaged, recognized, and drawn in (cf. Hess 2010).

Unless you are a professor teaching in a theological context, this way of engaging the “it” will be odd at best, and highly problematic at worst. Still, I think it is worth noting that there is congruence between the humility, respect, and wonder with which theologians and other members of communities of faith approach the “it” in this work, and the epistemological humility of which scientists write in their descriptions of profound scientific inquiry (cf. Palmer and Zajonc 2010). Further, pedagogical scholars (or to be more precise, “andragogical” – focusing on adult learners – scholars (cf. Knowles et al. 2015)) recognize that higher education professors need to find ways to approach the subjects they are teaching with what Buddhists term a “beginner’s mind” or Stephen Brookfield labels “critical inquiry” if they are to be effective in supporting learning (cf. Brookfield 2017). Here again Palmer is useful, for his “community of truth” model emphasizes the ways in which the “subject” or “topic” at center of a given learning event has its own agency (cf. Palmer 2007).

In the mist of digital ecologies, in the midst of the competing epistemologies all around us, our task as professors supporting learning is no longer – if it ever was – simply unearthing and collating facts to be shared (i.e., the content, the “it” of our work) but has to begin with a prior step: that is, catalyzing inquiry. Why would a student want to learn that which is at the heart of our discipline, our subject matter? I have found that TCI’s dynamic dance between the “I” and the “we,” in the midst of the “globe,” invites that kind of catalytic curiosity around the “theme” and invites a form of wonder which supports reflective and even transformative learning.

4. Spectrum of Reflective Practice

To return to where I began in this essay, in a world awash in competing “facts,” in the midst of context collapse, Cohen’s theme-centered interaction process offers a flexible yet structured, open yet bounded, hospitable yet charged, framework through which to shape reflective practice. In many higher education settings, it is difficult to discern how best to move toward this kind of work, and that is one reason why – at least in the theological/religious studies environment – we have found a table useful (cf. Hess 2008).

The Art of Hosting, Liberating Structures, Essential Partners, Circles of Trust, Civil Conversations Project: all these grassroots efforts in North America include frameworks for helping participants in learning events to listen more carefully, to attend more reflectively, and to speak more intentionally. This is an intersection in which the powerful work of theme-centered interaction, Ruth Cohen’s psychologically grounded and astute theorizing and practice, offers a substantial support to these forms of pragmatic engagement. Ultimately such reflective practices
support putting learning at the heart of higher education, rather than too narrowly falling into teaching-focused interaction.

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A New Culture Of Learning: Implications Of Digital Culture For Communities Of Faith

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“A new culture of learning” – that is a bold title for a paper of this sort. I need to begin by pointing out that I did not come up with it. It is the title of a book published by two luminaries who work in the field of learning more generally, Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown (2011). Yet I think this title aptly captures what we can see all around us, if we look closely, and thus I feel free to borrow it. That is, there are shifts underway in how learning happens in the 21st century. We, as educators working in Catholic communities, in a globalized world, need to be attentive to those shifts if we want to design learning experiences that are effective and constructive in that midst of that shift.

This paper will begin by laying out the elements of this new culture of learning, drawing heavily on the work of those researchers who have been part of the MacArthur Foundation’s “new digital literacies” projects, and which is so well summarized by Seely Brown and Thomas1 I will then contextualize that work more fully in Catholic contexts, and make a few tentative proposals for our continued development.

Before I go any further, I need to be clear about my own situatedness. I am a Roman Catholic layperson who teaches in an ELCA seminary in the United States. Each of those labels already narrows and constrains the lenses I bring to bear on this situation. At the same time, I have been working in the fields of media education and religious education for more than twenty years, and during that time have traveled to multiple contexts around the world learning from people who are studying the intersections of media, religion and digital cultures. From that point of view, I hope to offer useful “hooks” into the relevant literatures, and a frame for considering how these shifts that are being identified might emerge in your own contexts and teaching environments.

Please understand that what I offer here is meant to stimulate discussion and experimentation; it is not intended to be definitive.

What is this “new culture of learning” that is being described? It is crucial to the argument that Thomas and Seely Brown (hereafter referred to as TSB) are making, to grasp that learning happens not simply on an explicit or intentional level, but also at the level of the implicit, or incidental, and even ultimately, the null, or taboo, levels. They begin their observations by using the metaphors of the information network, and the petri dish. That is, they point to the potentially limitless nature of the current information environment and argue that to support learning in such a space, educators must design spaces that are appropriately bounded. Here the metaphor of the
petri dish is particularly evocative because it speaks to the deliberately constructed nature of a biological culture, which necessitates creating an environment upon which the specific organism one hopes to grow, depends for development; and the challenge of keeping such an environment, such a “culture,” appropriately rich and yet clearly bounded.

As TSB point out, this culture is not about:

unchecked access to information and unbridled passion, however. Left to their own devices, there is no telling what students will do. If you give them a resource like the Internet and ask them to follow their passion, they will probably meander around finding bits and pieces of information that move them from topic to topic – and produce a very haphazard result (81).

As TSB – and frankly, most other people who are attending to the challenges of teaching and learning with digital tools – we can no longer work in this environment, we cannot adequately create such “petri dishes” if our approaches are teaching-based; instead they must be learning-based. The distinction TSB make is increasingly common not only in the worlds of digital learning, online and distributed technologies, and so on, but also deep within a variety of accrediting organizations and other institutions dedicated to assessing and supporting learning. A “teaching-based” approach assumes a stable base of information to be shared “about” the world, whereas a “learning-based” approach is focused on learning “through” engagement with the world (37).

In my own context, for example, the recent shifts in the standards of the Association of Theological Schools are in precisely this direction. The focus of the ATS accreditation process requires schools seeking that accreditation to clearly articulate their learning outcomes, not simply at the level of individual student learning objectives in specific courses, but at the broader level of entire degree programs and the implicit as well as explicit learning of an institution.2

So the first shift in a new culture of learning is an intentional shift from “teaching- based” to “learning-based” approaches. The second shift has to do with moving away from the debates over the “private and the public” which have so captivated our attention in regard to social media in particular, and to think about, and embed in learning design, the “personal and the collective.” TSB are particularly alert to the kinds of learning that are taking place in various gaming structures, especially those with social and participatory elements to their design. The example they explore at length is that of World of Warcraft. In that environment (and the other games like it), unlike in our more typical definition of community, people do not learn in order to belong, but rather participate in order to learn.

Pause for a moment to think about that shift.
Collectives are not, as TSB note, “simply new forms of public spaces.” Rather, “they are built and structured around participation and therefore carry a different sense of investment for those who engage in them. Collectives, unlike the larger notion of the public, are both contextual and situated, particularly in engaging in specific actions” (56).

Why does this matter? If we pick up on the implicit curriculum at work in these places, if we pay attention to what TSB highlight as the “tacit” knowing that is occurring, we will recognize that an increasingly large number of people are “learning how to learn” in ways that stress their own passion, interest, and agency. Picking up on the work of Polanyi and others, TSB note that tacit knowing is the kind of knowing that builds from constantly changing experiences. Explicit knowing, on the other hand, tends to be that which has become stable and fixed over time. Here again you can pick up on the need for a shift from “teaching about” the world, to “learning through engagement with” the world. In a context in which there is a large body of fixed and stable knowledge, “teaching about” might be both functional and adequate. In a world, however, in which what constitutes “knowing” is constantly changing, rarely fixed, and deeply embedded in personal agency and experience, in that kind of world “one must learn through engagement” - that is we learn by doing, watching, experiencing.

In such a world the third element of the shift that TSB note is that of a move away from asking “what do we know?” to “what are the things we don’t know, and what can we ask about them?” (83). This is a practice that is particularly evident in the midst of various gaming environments, where often the primary objective in a given “room” or “area” of a game is to explore the space and figure out what resources exist there, what surprises can be tapped, and so on.

TSB begin to talk, in this part of their argument, about practices of “indwelling.” I imagine that many of us in the Catholic community might find our ears perking up at this word. For TSB, “indwelling” is the “set of practices we use and develop to find and make connections among the tacit dimensions of things. It is the set of experiences from which we are able to develop our hunches and sense of intuition” (85). The more people play certain kinds of video games, for instance, the more they hone their ability to pick up on clues that lead to unlocking new resources, and the more they experiment with what they can “do” in a given place. Incidentally, there is much to be made in this argument about the importance of “place,” of situatedness and location, yet another resonance with contemporary theological education.

Thus far, three elements of the shift in the new culture of learning: (1) a move from teaching-based” to “learning-based” approaches, (2) a shift from the public and private, to the personal and collective, and (3) a focus on tacit knowing which grows from inquiry-led approaches.
Perhaps the clearest statement TSB make, is to note that “the new culture of learning is about the kind of tension that develops when students with an interest or passion they want to explore are faced with a set of constraints that allow them to act only within given boundaries” (81).

Let me turn, now, to explore some of the possible implications for Catholic communities. First I think we need to ask: is any of this really all that new? Formation in collectives that draws deeply on personal experience and which is alert to tacit knowing could be one way of describing the work of religious communities, such as the collectives” of the School Sisters of Notre Dame or the Jesuits, to mention only two of the hundreds of religious orders that exist.

This culture of learning may be breaking down in congregational settings, where a community’s ability to socialize their young, let alone to initiate and form new members, was often dependent upon a larger cultural surround which is now often multi-faith in ways rarely appreciated in previous times. It may simply be, as Cathy Davidson notes in her recent book, Now You See It, that our practices of attention have been disrupted enough by these emerging digital technologies to enable us to “see” what has indeed been going on all around us (2011).

To return to TSB’s definition, “the new culture of learning is about the kind of tension that develops when students with an interest or passion they want to explore are faced with a set of constraints that allow them to act only within given boundaries” (81). I want to ask a specifically theological question about this definition, and to do so I’ll draw on a famous quote of Frederick Buechner’s, who wrote of “vocation” being where “your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the world we are moving into, at least for those of us who live within Christian communities – and I would venture to guess, rather than to assert, that there are similarities to be found in other faith communities – is that Christians believe human being to be something that is both a gift from God, and deeply broken. That is, to paraphrase a common assertion from the Lutheran seminary where I teach, we are “simultaneously saint and sinner.”

Thus, when I consider TSB’s work on a “new culture of learning,” I inevitably want to ask where that definition allows us to engage the brokenness, the sinfulness of being human. Where might we speak of God’s agency, not simply human agency? What draws us to faith in the midst of pain? I think one of the potentially most difficult challenges posed by this “new culture of learning” to communities of faith has to do with the deep affirmation we carry that we are not alone, we are not isolated beings complete in ourselves. It is not up to human beings, of our own individual accord, to control the world. We are not, in ourselves, singularly creative. We participate in creation, we participate in making the world whole, but we do not do this alone. To quote Gaudium et Spes, “The Word of God, through whom all things were made, became man and dwelt among us… He reveals to us that ‘God is love’ and at the same time teaches that… the effort to establish a universal communion will not be in vain.” (VCII, 203).
I think part of the very real and authentic skepticism that religious educators have brought to moving faith formation into digitally mediated, online spaces is that we recognize – although rarely publicly acknowledge – how difficult, limited, and sinful the learning can be even in those environments we believe we have shaped most carefully.

Given our concerns about the brokenness of our current institutions, about the wounding of the world through global capitalist exploitation, about the breakdown in relationship we see all around us, it is not surprising that we would ask serious questions about moving the already difficult process of theological education into spaces that would appear to attenuate our relationality. As Pope Benedict 16th noted in his message for the 45th World Communications Day:

> The new technologies allow people to meet each other beyond the confines of space and of their own culture, creating in this way an entirely new world of potential friendships. This is a great opportunity, but it also requires greater attention to and awareness of possible risks. Who is my “neighbor” in this new world? Does the danger exist that we may be less present to those whom we encounter in our everyday life? Is there a risk of being more distracted because our attention is fragmented and absorbed in a world “other” than the one in which we live? Do we have time to reflect critically on our choices and to foster human relationships which are truly deep and lasting? It is important always to remember that virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact with people at every level of our lives.

I believe, however, and have argued extensively in other contexts, that digital spaces are no less relational than so-called “in-person” spaces (Hess, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2011a, 2011b). The challenge is to attend to the tacit knowing that is being drawn on in a given space. So, for example, when I find myself as a woman feeling deeply discounted and “dis-embodied” by the gender dynamics in a face-to-face academic setting, I need to critique and engage them. Similarly, when colleagues argue that digital environments allow us to be pulled beyond our racialization and the systemic racism which confers white privilege upon me, I want to see the proof.

Thus, there are elements of critique and awareness that religious educators are – and must – bring to this new culture of learning. But are there other ways in which we might engage this analysis?

I would point to five strengths that appear within communities of faith when viewed through the TSB lens. Keeping in mind that I am drawing these strengths from my specific location, and thus
suggest them as evocative rather than definitive, I would note, first, that Catholic communities are largely tending a fairly esoteric body of knowledge. TSB write of how compelling the pursuit of esoteric knowledge is within gaming environments. There are scholars such as Craig Detwiler, who are using that analysis to suggest ways in which we might make our esoteric knowledge more inviting and intriguing to people who have grown up learning through gaming (2010). His description of structuring learning the Bible so that students might “level up” in particular ways is both compelling and fun. We have centuries of tradition and practices upon which to draw, and enormous storehouses of complex and sophisticated theological reflection and liturgical wisdom to share.

The second element I would note is that where TSB talk about the limitless nature of information in a networked society, I would ask us to think about our own wisdom within communities of faith for engaging and managing approaches to the infinite. That is, as Rahner points out, it is our recognition of our own limits that points to the limitless. It is in recognizing our own finitude that we become conscious of the infinity of a transcendent God. We have, within Christian community alone – there are myriad approaches in other faith traditions – a deep sense of the humility necessary for conversation about infinity. As Mark Edwards has written, we have a “characteristically sensitive approach to boundary conditions where we know reason is prone to err badly” (2002, 4). “Limitless” access to information is not in, and of itself, access to wisdom. Yet wisdom is what has been cultivated within religious traditions over eons.

The third and fourth elements I would point to as strengths that I see within communities of faith for engaging this new culture of learning, grow out of our deep commitment to what Parker Palmer has termed the “whole sight” of knowing with both one’s heart and one’s mind (1993, xxiii). We acknowledge that there is a necessity to know in this “whole sight” way, and we have much to share from our own work with that commitment. We have drawn from our tacit knowing, our own experiences of seeing, doing, and being to shape practices that lead to wisdom. These practices compel us to witness to the limitations of reason as well as to the limitations of emotion. We have centuries of practices that have been shaped to allow human beings to hone their integrative abilities. Sandra Schneiders is particularly evocative in her recognition of a Catholic understanding of spirituality:

- ...spirituality is understood as the unique and personal response of individuals to all that calls them to integrity and transcendence. [it] has something to do with the integration of all aspects of human life and experience.

- ...fundamentally spirituality has to do with becoming a person in the fullest sense. Spirituality is that attitude, that frame of mind which breaks the human person out of the isolating self. As it does that, it directs him or her to another relationship in whom one’s growth takes root and sustenance. (264)
Intimately connected to these third and fourth elements would be what I would label the fifth, although perhaps these are so entangled that it is hard to separate them? But the fifth element I would lift up is that communities of faith have long practice with bounded environments. Indeed in some ways I think that the growth of certain more clearly bounded religious communities grows out of the larger need people are experiencing for finding bounded environments in the midst of what can often feel like dramatically unbounded, unfounded, anti-institutional ways of being.

These five elements – esoteric knowledge, experience of finitude, commitment to integration, experience with tacit knowing, and practices of boundedness – are, however, all facing new challenges in our larger environments. These five elements which can contribute greatly to a new culture of learning, and which would appear to flourish in such a culture, are also newly at risk.

Consider, for instance, the ways in which the esoteric knowledges we tend are becoming rapidly inaccessible. Far too many theologians and catechists have refused to be present in digital spaces, have resisted making their work accessible in open sourced ways, have fought the development of online learning, and have generally argued that we ought not to be engaging digital technologies. I suppose that one element of what defines “esoteric” knowing is that it is “likely to be understood only by a small number of people with a specialized interest,” but if there are no ways to excite interest such that people are drawn into engagement and inquiry with that knowledge it will no longer be esoteric, but instead extinct. The MDiv students at the seminary where I teach, for instance, are required to take both Greek and Hebrew. My colleagues, who are excellent scholars as well as creative teachers, have found ways to invite these students to use newly emerging digital tools such as Accordance to draw them into deeper study of the languages. These students are discovering a passion for inquiry that will serve them well with these languages even once they are beyond the bounded classroom environments of a seminary.

The second element, a recognition of our finitude which leads to awareness of the divine and of our need for humility in the face of the divine, is also fading rapidly. A larger sense of God’s agency and power is diminishing all around us. Scientific explanations have been picked up in the wider popular culture as explanations that leach out the wonder of creation, that settle agency on human beings alone. I am not sure all of our scientists are comfortable with this. There are many who have written of the ways in which scientific method can lead into deeper wonder at the complexity and beauty of creation, ways in which scientific method forces open-ended humility. But that is not the stance most often presented in wider popular culture. Communities of faith, theologians, and lay catechists in particular, need to focus more directly on inviting engagement with the transcendence of God, and helping people to participate in – and thus learn – the practices which shape our belonging as humble humans in religious knowing.
The third and fourth elements, which have to do with a commitment to “whole sight,” and the practices of integration that shape it, are also facing keen challenges all around us. As Jesuit Fr. Allan Figueroa Deck has noted: “Another way to express this idea is to say that the catechesis broke down and failed to successfully make the connection between information (the content of faith) and performance (behavior), and between belonging to the Church and believing what it teaches.”

I have written elsewhere about the ways our practices of attention are being shaped in digital environments (2011). I would point, here, to the movement emerging within Christian religious education, which focuses on practices that are deeply constitutive of Christian identity but not specifically liturgical or creedal. The resource or issue here is developing daily practices, ways of engaging in a relationship with Jesus connected to the church in daily life. A good introduction would be Dorothy Bass’ edited collection, Practicing Our Faith (2010). There are resources being developed in local parish contexts throughout the U.S., some of which are being shared via the web and digital apps, some of which are simply too contextual to share broadly.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge to our strengths, however, is that which is being posed to our bounded environments. In the United States, at least in the Catholic community, we have tended to understand our boundedness through the structures of parish and diocese. But these structures are crumbling all around us, and it is not yet clear how they will be revived, or what will replace them. If we truly believe that the church is intimately missional in its being, and if we also affirm that the people of God are the church, then we must respect that God is doing something with us even in the moments and places that seem most unbounded. How might we do this?

In theological education, at least in my institution, we have begun to focus more directly on helping our students to practice what Scott Cormode has called “homiletical” or “gardening” forms of leadership, which tend directly to meaning-making, and in doing so help to shape the communicative practices of a community (2006). Such communicative practices can be embedded in social media just as much as they can be embedded in the structure of an institution, although they will take different shape in different environments.

Here is a place in which the practice of communicative theology is particularly pertinent and helpful. Communicative theology is a:

- …method where the source of its assertions can be identified… there is a critical correlation between content and form in communicative theology, that is highly relevant to context as well…

- … theology is a critical reflection on and understanding of the communication event…
• ...there are processes of communication that draw on the skills of everyone, where expertise remote from real life has no place, but where people cooperate in striving to find a theological practice that answers the needs of the community...

• ...communicative theology can be understood as a process that directs its ‘gaze’ – in the sense of theological hermeneutics – toward the communication event... [it is] shared and participatory... (20-23)

There are some important implications to such a process, among them:

• ...moving from ‘assent to truth’ to entrusting oneself to God’s ‘communicatio’ and ‘communio’ (75)

• ...there is a dynamic process engaged in theme-centered interaction that moves from the I, the We, and the It to form a triangle encompassed in a Globe... the individual subjects – the “I” factor – participate in the We, and are oriented toward faith (It) as their response to the communication of God in the ambivalent situation marked by the Globe...

• ...the authentic theological places where God shows God’s self to human beings in history include not only their biographies but also their interaction and communication... (147)

• ...thus, the processes shaped towards eliciting and identifying this revelation must, of necessity, be open, communicative, and oriented towards the borders, the edges, the spaces in which disturbance, perplexity and conflict arise... (155-156)

There is far more that could – and should – be said about the processes of communicative theology. While these theologians are articulating a very specific way of doing theology that relies on theme-centered interaction, their underlying assumptions have resonance with a number of differing theologies over the years and around the globe. The practice of communicative theology may well be one method by which we can listen carefully for what God might be doing in our midst – and listening is a key component of discipling and missional leadership.

Strengths – and challenges to those strengths – live all around us in catechesis and theological engagement. Yet I have not even touched on the specific suggestions that TSB and others are making for how to help educators move into and draw on what they are calling the new culture of learning. They argue, for instance, for three distinct yet overlapping frames for redesigning learning: homo sapiens, homo faber and homo ludens, or “humans who know, humans who make (things), and humans who play” (90).
In the space of “humans who know,” TSB want very much to emphasize the place-based nature of that knowing. Where are we knowing, and how is that sense of place shaping our knowing? I think this is a question that has permeated theological education for at least the last several decades, and Willie James Jennings’ recent book, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, provides further compelling substance to that inquiry. The advent of digital technologies, and the ability to use those technologies to make theological education accessible to people far beyond specific, seminary-based, locations has been a huge challenge to theological education – and a wonderful opportunity at the same time. What can we learn from these experiments for our Catholic schools, our parishes, and our lay catechists?

TSB talk at length about the issue of *homo faber*, and I have done so as well in other contexts (2008, 2010, 2011), because media educators learned long ago that one of the best ways to help students learn something effective about media was to help them to create in a specific medium. Yet I think it is worth noting, in this paper, that we ought to be asking “what” are we making? Are we making disciples? Are we making communities? Are we making collectives? Are we making lay catechists? Perhaps we are “making” all of these, or many of these, at once. But I’m not sure how often or how clearly we articulate this element of our educational environment.

I certainly believe that there are elements to our “making” that have been profoundly problematic. In the ELCA context, for instance, in the national *Book of Faith* project, we are learning that some of what has been taught in seminaries – the implicit curriculum of teaching the Bible, for instance – has “made” scholars, but not made teachers who could go out and help other people to learn the Bible in ways that are effective and constructive. Indeed, we are discovering that some of how we have taught biblical studies has led to pastors “teaching” their parishioners that they must have an expert in attendance any time they open up their Bible.

The third form of knowing that TSB point to – that of *homo ludens* – is at the heart of their book, particularly given all the MacArthur Foundation research upon which they have drawn. But what kinds of play are religious educators engaged in? I think we could potentially draw on multiple forms of play, everything from the sacred play of liturgy to the formal play of theater of the oppressed. But I am not sure how often we give ourselves permission to engage in play, even in carefully constructed “educational” play. The work of Johan Huizinga and others points to the serious nature of play, and the crucial ways in which learning takes shape in environments of play (2008). One element of play, of course, is the making of mistakes, and learning from failure. I doubt that making mistakes and learning from them is much in evidence in the seminary in which I teach, and anecdotal conversations with my colleagues in theological education suggest a similar pattern elsewhere. Henry Jenkins and colleagues have identified a set of learning outcomes they believe that citizens of the 21st century need to achieve (2006). Play, understood as the “capacity to experiment with one’s surroundings as a form of problem-solving” is at the top of their list. Here again is a place in which I would note the work of communicative
theologians as a resource. There is much that can be learned within the structured “play” of liturgy as well.

As I move through the work of TSB, and indeed the work of all those upon whom that book rests, I am struck repeatedly by its resonance with the discussion of theological educator David Tiede, who has been writing for years about the notion of a seminary as three-fold – academy, abbey and apostolate. A seminary as an academy, in all the rich complexity of the “academy” as understand here at the “American Academy of Religion,” is no doubt the form with which we are most familiar. Some of us may also have some experience with the “abbey,” particularly those of us who live within vowed religious communities. I suspect the notion of an “apostolate” is much less familiar to many. Yet in the Christian community, at least the earliest followers of Jesus, did not form an academy or an abbey – they were an apostolate, a community of apostles sharing their learning and experiences by engaging other learners and other experiences.

If we are serious about a “new evangelization,” if we are committed to understanding our church as missional to its core, then we must begin to look for what God is already doing with us. The “new culture of learning” opens new arenas of action for us, whole new contexts in which we might engage learning, and in doing so, share and learn with others both close at home and far away. I want to close by quoting TSB at length, for their emphasis on play is one that opens new room for us to see God at work in our midst: to play with the Spirit as she breathes amongst us.

The almost unlimited resources provided by the information network serve as a set of nutrients, constantly selected, and incorporated into the bounded environment of the petri dish, which provides the impetus for experimentation, play, and learning. Accordingly, the culture that emerges, the new culture of learning, is a culture of collective inquiry that harnesses the resources of the network and transforms them into nutrients within the petri dish environment, turning it into a space of play and experimentation.

That moment of fusion between unlimited resources and a bounded environment creates a space that does not simply allow for imagination, it requires it. Only when we care about experimentation, play, and questions more than efficiency, outcomes, and answers, do we have a space that is truly open to the imagination. And where imaginations play, learning happens. (118)

**Endnotes**


2 I believe that religious education is entering a new era of evangelization, one of enormous potential for growth and engagement.
3 See in particular Mizuko, 2009 and Jenkins, 2006. The overall project is accessible via the web at: http://tinyurl.com/3vw6xn.

4 For a quick entry into this discussion, see the recent ATS Colloquy, Volume 20,

5 Here the work of Lisa Nakamura and danah boyd is especially instructive

6 See, for example, Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, 2010.


8 Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Dale Martin have observed this more systematically in their own books.

9 Jenkins, p. 22


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The Triume God: Source And Fundament Of Human Communication
A Sketch Of Communicative Theology

By Lukács László
Budapest, 31st May 2007

Communication, as such, is as old as humankind. Human persons cannot live but in and out of constant communication with one another. Still there is a new phenomenon arising in the second half of the 20th century: communication has become one of the magic ideas common in the development of technology, sciences, and society.

New techniques of communication enabled us to be in constant audiovisual touch with one another – eliminating time and space as barriers of human communication. The new slogan is ours is the age of communication, we are in an information revolution. The technical development of mass media (or still better: social media), the communications industry, has gone alongside with the elaboration of different theories of communication. A new interdisciplinary branch of science appeared: that of communication. Semiotic and linguistic sciences are as intensively interested in creating theories of communication as social sciences and philosophy. There are numerous approaches to communication so one cannot speak about one single and unified theory of communication.88

The research of communication, its impact on individuals and societies, has found a great interest in anthropology and psychology as well. The question is not, simply, how the new media influenced the way of life, for worse or for better; one wanted to get closer to the very essence of human nature and of the person by analyzing communication as the basic phenomenon of human existence. Human beings are not only individuals but they live in a multiple network of relationships: person (persona) is the human being who is unique as individual but who at the same time lives in an immense network of communication. Neither collectivism nor individualism can satisfy our human condition: individuals are to live in communion with one another – this is the only way to achieve genuine self-development, to live fully human.

At the same time – in the post Vatican II Council era of the church – new insights were born in theology as well. Some of these ideas were integrated in the documents of the Council, others were inspired by the Council, yet others were discovered in the past few decades. In the center of this development the doctrine on the Holy Trinity is found. This topic was rather marginalized for centuries as a respectful but faraway entity which is the origin and background of all but has

little relevance for our everyday life. Kant’s opinion was characteristic not only in the practical pastoral work of the church, but also for theological studies: “Aus der Dreieinigkeitslehre, nach dem Buchstaben genommen, lässt sich schlechterdings nichts fürs Praktische machen.”

The trinitology of our days has discovered the rich heritage of the Church Fathers, and in their footsteps tried to gain insights into the inner life of the “Immanent Trinity” which has been revealed to us in the “Economic Trinity.” According to Karl Rahner’s famous axiom: "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity." God’s communication to the world is preceded by his self-communication within the loving communion of the three divine persons.

The main points of this “new theology” are as follows:

- The loving communion of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is the source and final goal of the whole created universe
- revelation is the self-communication of God who is love
- incarnation, cross and resurrection are the peak-point of the history of salvation
- the Church is the Sacrament of Salvation
- the history of salvation is coextensive with human history with the final goal of reaching the loving communion of the Holy Trinity

A new (or ancient old, though forgotten!) horizon of our faith was emerging in and after the Council. One can find the basic outlines of this “new theology” in the very documents of the Council too: revelation as the loving communication of the Triune God with humankind (Dei Verbum); Church as the communion of love based on the God of Love, i.e. the Father and the Son and the Spirit (Lumen Gentium); the dialogue of Church and world to help human development (Gaudium et Spes).

Two non-theological concepts – communication and communion – stand in the middle of recent theological considerations, leading to a fruitful encounter with the revolution of communication in our times. (The “intrusion” of non-theological concepts into the sacred field of theology and

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90 The Eastern Orthodox Churches were more faithfully bound to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Over sixty years ago, amid the horrors of the Second World War, the Russian theologian, Vladimir Lossky, wrote that the only alternative to the Trinity is hell. See God in Trinity, in: The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, Cambridge, 1957. 66.

the faith of the church is, by far, not a new phenomenon: e.g. the word “homousios” used by the Council of Nicaea, the Aristotelian terms used by Thomas Aquinas etc.) Lots of theological inquiries and church documents deal with communication in our days, but most of them focus on the use of mass-media or means of social communications: how to use them more effectively in church life as new tools of Evangelization and catechesis; in fostering a sense of community among believers; how to educate believers to a proper use of the media as recipients and perhaps also as communicators; what is the impact of modern media on our lives in society and in the church. To my mind, all this is important, but not sufficient. The practical approach to the media should be completed with a theoretical research of communication as the basis of our human condition. There are promising initiatives in this field as well: to elaborate a theology of communication, and what is more, to create a communicative theology. Such studies can enlighten both the essence of human life and the history of salvation which is the result of divine communication with us human beings.

Such an endeavor can help us to comprehend better who the Triune God is, what is his salvific will with creation and incarnation, what is the essence and orientation of the history of salvation. It can also help our contemporaries, formed by communication, to understand their opportunities for a better human life, but also aware of the threats and evil consequences of a misused communication.

In the following argumentation the term “communication” will be used as defined by Karl Rahner in his Theological Dictionary. According to Rahner, “communication is a conveyance based upon the ability of listening and of free openness resulting in a communion between the sender and the receiver.” This community can be called communication as well. In the highest form of communication, the sender communicates his own self with the recipient: this is self-communication. Total self-communication is realized only in the Holy Trinity, but the triune God is capable of communicating with humankind.

Following the principles mentioned above, our argumentation is structured in three steps:

**First step:** Communication within the immanent Trinity (“ad intra”)

**Second step:** The “ad extra” work of the economic Trinity:

1. Revelation as divine-human communication
2. Divine-human communication as sacramental interchange
3. The climax of revelation: Jesus Christ the Symbol of God

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93 Some authors rightly prefer using the words „ad intra” rather than „immanent” because this term expresses better the perichoretic love of the divine persons opening in creation and revelation „ad extra.” Cf. Torrance, Alan J.: Persons in Communion. Edinburgh, 1996. 279.
4. The church as sacrament of salvation and communion of the people of God.

**Third step:** the possible impact of a communicative theology for church and society.

Needless to say in the framework of such a modest proposal for further debate a dangerously narrow path can only be followed, neglecting e.g. the majestic debates between the great Western and Eastern theologians about the immanent Trinity, or the more recent debates about the trinitology of Karl Rahner or Karl Barth. One needs to apologize for the oversimplification of the different theological views and opinions or even their neglect to simply give a hint for communication theology or, better, communicative theology.

**First Step: Communication Within the Immanent Trinity**

The traditional chapter of dogmatic theology *De Trinitate* has become one of the most popular topics of contemporary theologians. Dozens of books and hundreds of articles have appeared about the Trinity in the past few decades. One idea is, however, common in the different approaches: most of them try to depict the inner life of the Triune God as the most dynamic life of divine loving communion. The notion of “*perichoresis*” used by the Church Fathers is reinvented and reinterpreted in today’s trinitologies.

The expression used most frequently by Christians is *love*. The central message of Christ is that God loves us because he himself is love forever. His love had not begun with his love towards the created world and human beings; it belongs to the inner life of the eternal One-God. Love is the very essence of God, who is the *communio* of three persons who are one God yet live in an eternal self-giving. *God is love: a perfect communion of the three divine persons in the perfect communication of love.* In theological terms: God-Father, giving himself completely to his Son, to the extent of being one with him; God-Son, receiving completely his Father into himself, so that they are completely one divinity; and God-Spirit, the joyful result, the complete gift, of the loving union between the Father and the Son. St. Augustine describes this mutual exchange with the term *relatio*, which means that the divine persons are completely one except the manner of their relationship in the perichoresis of love.

As the Council of Florenz defined it: “Everything in them is one where there is no opposition of relationship” (DH 1330). And: “Because of that unity the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy spirit is wholly in the Father and in the Son” (DH 1331). Or as Heribert Mühlen puts in our days: “The differentness of the divine persons, to the extent that they are persons (… is so great, that it cannot be conceived as any greater, whereas their unity (…) is so intensive that it cannot be conceived of as any more intensive.”

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communication theory, Pierre Babin refers to the Holy Trinity as follows: “Communication, c’est un mot céleste, la révélation de ce rapport sans aucune dysharmonie entre émetteurs et récepteurs. le Père, le Fils et la Saint-Esprit.”

The process of self-giving “begins” with the Father, he is the origin without origin, the Son receives everything = his whole divine person is the Son of the Father who gives himself totally as gift to his Son: they are of one essence, so that he returns himself as gift to the Father in thanksgiving. The “outcome” of this infinite dialogue of love is the Person of the Holy Spirit, who combines the two divine Lovers. John D. Zizioulas has built his whole personal ontology on the persons of the Triune God: “his being is identical with an act of communion (…) Love as God’s mode of existence “hypostizes” God, constitutes his being.” Or in the formulation of W. J. Hill: “Divine love is not a sterile symbiosis of lovers but an élan of perfect life wherein the love itself becomes a reality over and against the lovers with all the density of ontological personhood.”

Efforts to create a new, personal ontology, based on the loving communion of God has been made by numerous authors: “In the theology of the Trinity a new ontology is developed: for God to be is to be in communion.”

The only one God is the Holy Trinity. And human beings are created in the image and likeness of this Triune God, to be brought into that communion of love. God is total love, total and mutual gift of the divine persons to one another. In other words: he is (they are?) total communication. St. John begins his Gospel as follows: “In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God.” This statement can be paraphrased as: “In the beginning was Communication.” The whole history of salvation can be described as communication from its primordial source and fundament in the Triune God, through our human history, up to its final eschatological perfection of the “new heaven and new earth.” P. Hoffmann refers to Richard of St. Victor claiming that “immanent Trinity is the source and goal of all human communication society.”

The self-communication of the Triune God does not end up in the intratrinitarian communion of divine love, but is extended to humankind by the creation of the world. As Karl Rahner puts it: „The only really absolute mysteries are the self-communication of God in the depths of existence, called grace, and in history, called Jesus Christ, and this already includes the mystery of the Trinity in the economy of salvation and of the immanent Trinity."

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Second Step: The Work of the Economic Trinity

1. Revelation as divino-human communication

Before examining revelation as communication a few remarks are necessary concerning human communication. As stated above: perfect communication is total giving of the self. Though human beings are essentially beings of communication, perfect and total self-giving cannot be reached by them, for at least two reasons. Human beings are enclosed in time and space, they can present themselves only in pieces or fragments. What is more, if I give something to another person, this appears as loss on my part: my gift presented to somebody is counted as my expenditure. Total self-giving can be achieved only in dying for the other – that is why martyrs are so respected both in the church and in the world. “Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10,39). But even this ultimate and tragic act of selfless giving ourselves to others does not lead to real communion – it cannot be called communication in its full sense.

How can human persons – who are “Geist in Welt”, “spirit united with the material cosmos” – communicate with one another, transcending the limits of time and space? Our body – which does not simply belong to us but is the essential part of our person according to the famous axiom: “anima forma corporis” – is a prison, closing us from others, but at the same time a bridge, a medium connecting us with others. That is why human communication is realized on various levels and by various means of communication.

There are different theories trying to explain and analyze the conditions and rules of human communication. Certain points are, however, common in the different approaches: 1. there must be some external (material) element (=medium) conveying the message. – 2. Signs, among them preeminently words, play an important role in communication. – 3. Communication is an interpersonal act: it can only be achieved by persons: one person (the “sender”) utters, conveys a message in the “envelope” of a visible sign to another person (the “recipient”) who is able to decode the message and is willing to accept it. – 4. The only real aim of all interpersonal communication is the (loving) communion of the communicators.

The conclusion of all these theories of communication was that within our human world nobody – not even God – can communicate without mediation, without using human means of communication. If God wants to get into touch with human beings, if he wants to create interpersonal relationships with humanity – even he has to accept the rules of human communication and use it as means in order to enter into communion with human beings. As Vatican II declared: “Through this revelation the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.
This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having in inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”

Revelation – as seen by the Council Fathers – is God’s loving self-communication “ad extra” (from our point of view: a transcendental process) by the means of words and deeds (a process immanent in human history). That is why it can be called – in contrast with the immanent (ad intra) divine communication of the three persons within the Triune God – a divine-human communication. The fullness of this revelation is the person of Jesus Christ who is the only mediator and who is the fulfillment of communion between God and human beings: he is “true God and true man” and not “a confused mixture of the divine and the human.” The term “unio hypostatica” tries to express this unique reality: Jesus Christ is inseparably true God and true man. This fact has immense consequences to the whole area of communication between God and humankind leading to our loving communion with the Holy Trinity – the key to the whole history of salvation can be found here.

Jesus Christ appears as historical figure on the stage of human history. But God the Father sends to us also his Holy Spirit – using the beautiful phrase of St. Iraeneus, the Father creates with his “two hands”, the Son and the Spirit. “The Holy Spirit communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son.” It must be analyzed, later on, how the Son and the Holy Spirit work jointly to communicate with human persons. (Their “collaboration” for our salvation leads us to the problem of external and internal grace.)

2. Divine-human communication as sacramental interchange

Soon after the birth of the new science of communication a great deal of research in sacred and sacral communication was begun, along with a special field of Christian communication. It is impossible to analyze, or even to enumerate here, all these theories. Just two approaches are to be mentioned. Both try to give a Christian approach to communication and make use of it in religious life. Pierre Babin follows the footsteps of McLuhan in interpreting communication. He enumerates six different schemes of communication. The most important insight is that besides the schemes of language, Babin speaks about communication of Affinity (distinguishing

101 Council Vatican II Dei Verbum Nr. 2.
103 Catechism, Nr. 683-689.
the communication of Friendship and of Spirit). The conclusion of his argumentation can perhaps be formulated that human communication necessarily has an external (material) side and an internal (personal) side: as complex beings human communication can only be complex and thus mediated.105

Even Babin refers to symbols as perhaps the most important means in communication. Symbol-theory, in fact, has widely been accepted and analyzed not only in Christian context but also in various semiotic research. It has found a great echo among theologians and modern sacramentology is mainly based on the theory of symbolic communication.106

Communication is an exchange of signs, a process of exchange of how human persons can come into contact with one another and eventually form communion.107 The use of symbols as means of mediation in our human condition is the most common starting-point for modern sacramental theologies. To quote just one of the classical authors, L.-M. Chauvet: "Le réel ne nous est jamais présent que de manière médiate, c’est-à-dire construite à travers le réseau symbolique de la culture qui nous façonne."108 Or Karl Rahner: “Das Seiende ist von sich selbst her notwendig symbolisch.”109 He claims for a “theology of Christian symbolic reality” and adds: “Das eigentliche Symbol (Realsymbol) ist der zur Wesenskonstitution gehörende Selbstvollzug eines Seienden im anderen.”

As is well known, Rahner calls the sacraments of the church “Realsymbole” because they also contain and convey what they signify. Symbols, by definition, are visible signs (Augustin: signa sacra): a piece of the material world contains a non-visible, yet very condense reality. (In scholastic terms “res”, the personal self-giving, the act of becoming united, is realized by the “sacramentum”, the sign containing reality which is received by the recipient.”) This communication was extended outside God to humankind in the history of salvation. But – and this is an important rule of human condition – even God revealing, communicating, himself cannot be without the mediation or representation of symbols. His revelation is communicated also by symbols – let it be the created universe, or the history of the Old Testament or Jesus Christ himself. The communication of the Triune God of love ad extra is subdued to the rules of symbolic mediation, in other words, of sacramental communication. That is why Jesus Christ can be called the sacrament of God and the church also as sacrament of salvation, following the redeeming function of Jesus the primordial sacrament.

Rahner argues that this divine-human communication is possible only because God is eternally communication. “Weil Gott sich innergöttlich ‘ausdrücken’ ‘muss’, kann er sich auch nach

105 This ideas are mainly described in his second book mentioned above.
106 The Catechism of the Catholic Church itself follows this argumentation: cf. Nr. 1145-1152.
107 Cf. Meuffels: op.cit. 20.
aussen aussagen.” That is why “der menschgewordene Logos (…) das absolute Symbol Gottes in der Welt ist, das unüberbietbar mit dem Symbolisierten erfüllt ist.”

There seems to be, however an immense difference between divine and (divine)-human communication. In the Trinity ad intra the perfect communication of love is fulfilled directly in their communion. Whereas in their communication to the world this communication can be achieved only “indirectly”, by symbols: in creation, in Christ, in the Church, and in the sacraments of the Church.

It is an ancient tradition among theologians to see the created world as image and footstep of God, and this speaks about “natural sacraments.” Quite a few contemporary theologians develop this idea: the universe as such has a sacramental character in which the communicative self of God is manifested.

God’s “natural revelation” was continued by his concrete revelation in the Old Testament: this is the beginning of communication to create a loving relationship with the chosen people. A free initiative of God to embrace even human persons with his love, to invite them into his loving community extending his divine perichoresis. Its first form was the Old Covenant, the ongoing communio between God and his chosen ones (which could not be destroyed by any human sins, faults, and mistakes!). Its peak point was the accomplished unity in the person of Jesus Christ, in the New Covenant.

The history of revelation in the Old Testament is the history of divine-human communication: God reveals himself i.e. his love to draw the chosen people in this loving communion. For that reason, he makes a Covenant with them. “Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men. He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind.”

According to Vatican II, revelation is not simply information about the eternal will of God but a communication of love. “Communication is more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level it is the giving of self in love.” But this process of communication-revelation was subject to the rules of the human condition, to communication through symbols. „c’est dans la réalité d’une vie symbolique, ou s’échangent paroles et dons, que l’Amour peut être aimé.”

10 Rahner, Karl: op. cit. 292.
12 Vatican II.: Dei Verbum Nr. 6.
13 Pastoral Constitution Communio et Progressio Nr. 11.
The Catechism depicts God’s revelation in creation, in the Covenant and then in Jesus. Unfortunately, however, in this place\(^{115}\) only the “signs taken up by Christ” are mentioned, without referring to Christ himself as the greatest sign of the loving God. This is, though, explicitly declared at the beginning of the book speaking about “Christ Jesus – ‘Mediator and Fullness of all revelation’”: “Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father’s one, perfect and unsurpassable Word.”\(^{116}\)

Rahner argues with the idea of *unio hypostatica*, proving that the “menschgewordene Logos (…) das absolute Symbol Gottes in der Welt ist.” Jesus Christ not only teaches about God, but makes him present, in our human history. As it runs by Haight: “The doctrine of the two natures corresponds to the dialectical structure of *Jesus as symbol of God*.”\(^{117}\)

3. *The climax of revelation: Jesus Christ the Symbol of God*

If we accept the traditional definition of the sacraments (“sacramenta efficiunt quod significant et significant quod efficiunt”), it is more than natural to call Jesus the primordial sacrament of God, the Love of God in person. “The whole history moves toward the self-communication of God to human existence. That union is absoluted in God’s presence to human existence in Jesus Christ, and in an absolute human acceptance in Jesus’ death on the cross.”\(^{118}\)

In the life and person of Jesus all the elements of real symbols, of perfect communication, can be found:

- He has, in itself, the whole perfect divine, though hidden, presence of God: he is God’s perfect symbol (i.e. he is real God, being one with the Father in the Spirit): “Philip, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14,9.) This statement is in contrast to the Arians claiming that Jesus is not real God.

- He has a perfect human nature, with human conscience and will; this statement is in contrast with docetism and monothelitism.

- The Symbol Jesus is not simply a means of communication, mediated between two persons (that of God and of the human person), but he, himself, is a person.

- As a result, the whole communicative dynamic process of symbols is present in Jesus:

\(^{115}\) Cf. Note 19.
\(^{116}\) Catechism of the Catholic Church Nr. 65.
\(^{118}\) Haight: op. cit. 321.
a/ In that divine-human communication the Father utters himself so completely in Jesus-the-Man as in the eternal Logos: the eternal Son “emptied himself” (Phil 2,7) in the Kenosis of Incarnation, Death and Eucharist.

b/ Jesus as true man has received the love of God totally in complete filial obedience to the Father – that is why the self-giving of God has resulted in perfect communion, in personal union between God and humanity.

c/ Jesus did not simply take up the love of God in his life, but by his death and resurrection returned it so perfectly that the reciprocal (perichoretical) love of the Holy Trinity has been extended to humankind as well: due to his salvation for us human beings are taken into the loving communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

d/ The final aim of this salvific process is to take all people on earth into one communion with God and with one another. This task is entrusted to the church born from the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

4. *The church as sacrament of salvation and communion of the people of God.*

Jesus, the Symbol of God, continues his salvific activity in his body, the Church. “The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument, both a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.” It is “the universal sacrament of salvation.”119 Christ and his church cannot be separated. “Jesus is the real symbol of God’s self-communication to the world. The church has the function of making historically present, and tangible with the world, this symbolization of God’s self-communication. (…) Only if the symbolization of God’s self-communication in Jesus continues historically can Christ continue to be a real symbol of God’s presence for humanity.”120 There is, however, a fundamental difference between the two symbols: Christ as true God and true man is the only and utmost real-symbol of God. The church can be the sacrament of God only in a secondary sense and in relationship with Christ. As the Church Fathers liked to use the metaphor: Jesus is the Sun, the church is the moon, mirroring only the light of the sun.

Christ is the only mediator between God and humankind. The church must continue his redeeming work of mediation throughout the history: foster the divine-human communication (*divinum commercium*) and thus serve the communion of people with God and with one another. This task is fulfilled first by the service of the Word and of the Sacraments. Due to controversies during the Reformation, the two things were seen to be opposing each other: the churches of

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Reformation claimed for the service of the Word, the Catholic church defended the sacraments. Theology today combines the two: sacraments are not simply mechanical instruments of grace distributed by the church, but they presuppose a personal commitment on part of the receiver. Alexandre Ganoczy claims for a “communicative understanding of the sacraments” and this insight is more and more widespread in sacramentology.121 “Weil die tragende Realität aller Sakramente Gott in seiner angebotenen Selbstmitteilung ist, dient seiner wirksamen Gegenwart in angemessener Weise nur jenes Wort, das mitteilungsfähig ist, und nur jene Handlung, die gebend-nehmenden Austauschcharakter besitzt. Gerade auf eine solche Angemessenheit zwischen Gnade in Person und ihre ‘Media’ im Hinblick auf die aktiv-empfangenden Addresataten kommt es an.”

The church is called to become model and instrument for this loving communion, for the divine-human communication throughout human history. God loves us and asks for our love – to love him and one another. As St. John wrote: “My dear friends, let us love each other. Since love is from God... God is love.” (1John 1,1). This is the heritage and message of the Church; Jesus claimed himself to be the son of God: he called Jahve, the majestick only God – his father (the aramaic word “Abba” can be best translated as “Daddy”), and spoke about the Holy Spirit, who is sent to us by both himself and the Father.

Speaking about the final aim of communication, the pastoral instruction Communio and Progressio expresses the same idea. It states about Jesus: „While He was on earth Christ revealed Himself as the Perfect Communicator. Through His ’incarnation’, He utterly identified Himself with those who were to receive His communication and He gave His message not only in words but in the whole manner of His life.”

This task is to be continued by the church: „In the Christian faith, the unity and brotherhood of man are the chief aims of all communication and these find their source and model in the central mystery of the eternal communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live a single divine life.” That is why „the media of social communication can contribute a great deal to human unity.”

The church is called to become communio, as symbol and earthly continuation of the trinitarian communion. It is a communicative society serving humankind. „Angesicht des Menschen, der wesentlich ’animal communicans’ ist, erschliesst sich das in Jesus Christus öffentlich gewordene Geheimnis Gottes als Schöpfer einer umfassenden Kommunikationsgeschichte, innerhalb derer die Kirche Christi als Kommunikationskollektiv ihren Sinn hat.”

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122 Pastoral Instruction Communio et Progressio. Nr. 8.
123 Ganoczy: op.cit. 116.
It is beyond our limit here to go into details of the role of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation. Just one remark may be mentioned from the point of view of communication. God’s self-communication through history culminates in Jesus Christ. The Risen Christ outpours his Spirit upon the first Christians and promises to stay with his church by the Spirit. “God pours out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us; thus the first and most necessary gift is love, by which we love God above all things and our neighbor because of God.”

God’s love is mediated through Christ by the church and its sacraments – in the power of the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit is not limited to the visible church. Grace may also be given directly, into the midst of human beings, his spirit becoming our spirit. In terms of communication, his indwelling may be direct, invisible, reaching any people unnoticed, anonymously, without any human instruments as means of communication. As Karl Rahner puts it: “in grace, that is, in the self-communication of God’s Holy Spirit, the event of immediacy to God as man’s fulfillment is prepared for in such a way that we must say of man here and now that he participates in God’s being; that he has been given the divine Spirit who fathoms the depths of God; that he is already God’s son here and now, and what he already is, must only become manifest.” Rahner’s basic thesis is that human history is the event of transcendence. This is to say that through the supernatural existential—it “takes place” within, or “is mediated” by, everyday history—human beings experience their transcendentality. Only within this condition of human transcendence are human beings enabled to experience and receive God’s self-communication through historical mediation, which is called “salvation history.”

Third Step: The Possible Impact Of A Communicative Theology For Church And Society

The Communio-God is announced by Jesus and is destined by him to be continued in the church. The comunio, which is the church, finds its model in the comunio which is the Trinity. Up to the Vatican II Council the church was called societas perfecta, perfect society. Sober self-critical analysis of the reality of the church let the term be omitted from the texts of Vatican II. But it is valid to say that by its heritage, its origin and its mission, the church is a perfect comunio. “The vocation of the church is to be a communion, a living source of Trinitarian relationships.” The extraordinary synod of 1985 deliberately viewed the church as comunio, and since then this approach has been accepted almost unanimously – though there were several critical voices against the misuse of this phrase.

If the church is built on relationships, then it must be, and there must be, communication. God communicates himself in the Word and in the Sacraments, and makes it possible for us to

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124 Vatican II. Lumen Gentium Nr. 42.
125 Rahner: Foundations of Christian Faith, op. cit. 120.
communicate with one another, to establish brotherhood and sisterhood within the church, and become a sign of communion and communication for the whole human family. (That means, that we are all called to do our best to live according to this communicative, living communion in the spirit of solidarity and service, in constant reconciliation, in a committed effort to improve the life of every person around us.)

What has been said about the Triune God who is love is not an abstract formula: *real communio is perfect communication*. It is proclaimed, cherished, and carried by the church even if it is not carried out in its full form. Living fully human means to live in communion (i.e. in communication) with others both on the microlevel of private life and on the macrolevel of social life. The church by its origin and essence and goal is/should be a *communication-communio*. With its very existence, with its mistakes and frailties, with its efforts for a better communion, but first of all with its continuous proclamation and presentation of the loving communion of the Holy Trinity, it can offer a model and a companion to society in its effort to change into a genuine communications society and to the individuals to fulfil their self-development in strengthening their loving relationships, their communications with others.

We have been pleading for a communicative theology, leading to new insights first of all within trinitology, christology, ecclesiology, and sacramentology. But the church needs a *communicative pastoral activity* as well. Evangelization and catechesis cannot be a one-way proclamation of the Good News, it must be fulfilled in an interactive way, in continuous dialogue with those who receive it. No need to say that those who proclaim the Gospel, must always remain “disciples of Christ”, in continuous dialogue with the self-giving God, in communion with the Triune God.

It could be a special field of research to review all the priestly, prophetic, and pastoral activities of the church; to discover their communicative dimension and draw practical conclusions for a renewed life of the church.

The final goal, however, can be summed up in just one sentence: *in the history of salvation, human persons are drawn into the perichoresis of the Triune God*. This extension of God’s loving community, however, cannot be fulfilled completely in our earthly life. But the whole history tends towards its fulfillment in the eschaton, where this loving communion will be perfect with the communion of the three divine persons, in the “*visio beatifica*”, where no symbols are needed any more for the perfect – divine – communication of God with the communion of all the saints. According to the vision of St. John there is no temple in the city of God: “The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are themselves the temple” (Rev 21,22).
Communicative Theology & Students’ Digital Culture

By Frances Forde Plude

[Presented at the 2009 College Theology Society conference, Notre Dame University.]

When I suggest we reflect upon the impact of today’s global “Information Age”, most people will visualize a tsunami – a huge wave of water (or information) rolling over us, drowning us. Recognize the feeling? I suggest we imagine, instead, an earthquake, where the ground we stand on is rumbling and the buildings around us are shaking, some being demolished and falling around us. The ultimate cause of this disturbance is the seismic shifting of plates underneath the earth’s surface. We see the results of the underground shifts; but the deeper cause of these disturbances lies beneath the surface.

Using this metaphor, I would like to reflect with you upon the model (see Appendix) proposed by Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, the authors of The Practice of Communicative Theology: Introduction to a New Theological Culture (Crossroad, 2008). On page 26 of this volume their model, based upon the Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) model of Ruth C. Cohn, proposes three points of a triangle: It, We, and I, encircled by the Globe. The first point of the triangle is the faith tradition (the “It”); the second triangle point is people in their groups, communities in their interactions and intercommunication (the “We”); and the third point of the triangle consists of individuals with their life and faith history (the “I”). The authors propose that linking these three corners of the triangle results in “a dynamic structure of communication” – because it involves all three: the content, the group, and the individual.

However, the part I want to focus upon in this model is the circle drawn around the triangle: the globe, or what the authors refer to as “the global reality of society and church.” My premise is that the global context of this model must today be understood as a world-wide Information Age – a global network society.

This is the contemporary reality in which individuals (including your students), groups, and faith traditions exist. This reality, this dynamic, of a global network society is the truly seismic shift occurring under the ground we are all standing upon. We see reality around us shifting; we see long-established habits and institutions challenged (in journalism, in churches, for example). But what are the ‘underground’ shifts causing this ‘above-the-ground’ collapse? It is a huge topic. So I’ve organized a format that will help me to communicate lots of information; this will help you to absorb key factors, and it will give you a ‘data base’ you can take home with you to enrich your own thinking and teaching.
I have prepared some fact sheets for distribution (see Appendices). I want to get a lot of data down on paper so we could spend our time thinking about these data, reflecting on their meaning, their impact on us as individuals, as teachers, as members of a faith community. Before sharing these fact sheets with you, let me take a few minutes to share with you my personal journey toward this ‘earthquake’ reality – sort of a “witness” sharing – as I have moved toward our current scene.

About fifteen years ago I was invited to attend a week-long live-in conference in Rome of about a dozen theologians and communication specialists. We were to spend the week in small and large groups discussing ecclesiology and communication. Pat Granfield edited our resulting papers in a Sheed and Ward volume entitled *The Church and Communication*. My chapter in that book is entitled: “Interactive Communications in the Church.” In this chapter I explore interactive communication technologies as a metaphor for a more dialogical ecclesiology, or theology of church. That was fifteen years ago!

Well, there have been many advances in interactive technologies in those fifteen years. Whether our ecclesiology is more dialogic is not so visible. Incidentally, Brad Hinze has written a marvelous book exploring dialogue in the Catholic Church (or the lack of it), through various case studies. This volume, along with other items, is listed in my reference section below.

Before that Rome conference I left a career as a television producer and on-air host, to do doctoral work at Harvard and MIT – looking especially at the impact of new communication technologies on government policies, on institutions, on religious groups. I remember one of my major concerns entering Harvard was to prepare myself to advocate for less privileged groups as technological tools empowered the wealthy, the already powerful. What about developing nations, with their largely poor populations? What about women, always under-empowered? Who would represent these groups in a more technological world?

So, armed with my Harvard doctorate and this Rome conference experience, I engaged in an academic teaching and research life exploring the integration of communication and theology. This work has resulted in many individuals producing numerous books, conferences and academic papers in a field that came to be known as “Communication Theology.” We conducted annual forums at the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) for a decade. Bob Schreiter and Elizabeth Johnson and others were staunch supporters of this inquiry. The Communication Theology enterprise connects scholars (of various ages, including many younger scholars) all around the world.

Meanwhile, the important Communicative Theology work of Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath was developing in Europe, representing a wisely pastoral application of theology and
communication principles. Another example of this pastoral application is the Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation – an online program at the University of Dayton.

Along the way, over these fifteen years, another major experience informed my passion for this. I was invited to become a member of a small international ecumenical think tank called the International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture. For a decade, our group met each year for a week of dialogue and study in various locales around the world – Africa, Latin America (Brazil and Ecuador), Europe (Rome) and Eastern Europe (Ukraine), Asia (Bangkok and Australia), and North America (Hollywood, Vancouver and Boulder, Colorado). In each location we spent a week communicating with local specialists in religion, media, and culture, and visiting various local sites. These global visits (and the chance to dialogue among ourselves about our own research projects) taught me almost as much as three years of doctoral studies at Harvard University. An underlying reality began to creep into my consciousness: communication studies is not just about communicating; it is also about culture. So now I have had the benefit of experience in TV studios, studies at Harvard, networking with communication theology colleagues around the world, and global conversations about communication, religion, and culture.

And all the while, in my teaching and research in communication technologies, I struggled mightily to keep abreast of the changes: moving from satellites and fax machines, to PCs, the Internet, laptops, wireless connections, cell phones morphing into computers with Internet connections, video streaming on our computers, other personal digital assistants, social Internet communities, video games – all of it. About a year ago I started a serious study of the deeper meaning of the global network society. For today’s presentation I studied two authors and I have shared data from their work in the fact sheets packet I have prepared for you.

The first, Manuel Castells, born in Spain, was for many years a professor at Berkeley, with Silicon Valley right up the road. He authored a trilogy (cited on the fact sheets) entitled The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Volume I is the Rise of the Network Society; Volume II explores The Power of Identity (the project of the self and social activism empowered by global networks). And Volume III, entitled End of Millennium, examines the role of the State – the collapse of industrial state-ism in the Soviet Union, the varied financial and governmental policy crises in the Asian Pacific and the unification of Europe. All these volumes explore the wide-ranging and deep ramifications of a globally networked world.

These volumes are encyclopedic! They are filled with statistical data and Castells analyzes global and regional trends many people have missed altogether. He links the ideas of many respected scholars like Anthony Giddens while showing that some concepts, such as the post-industrial society, are flawed. He examines world-wide movements like environmentalism, the global criminal network, and radical fundamentalism. However, Castells also explores the impact
of the global network “on the ground” – on issues like global poverty, world-wide and regional employment, and the role of women, for example.

The other author I have shared in my fact sheets is Don Tapscott, who wrote the 2009 volume *grown up digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World*. As you will see in the fact sheet on the Net Geners, Tapscott headed a huge research project to get a factual profile of this population cohort.

With the background I have sketched above, I am more and more engaged in these deep data explorations. I am convinced we are feeling (in our various corners of the universe) the structural damage or collapse of many institutions we have taken for granted. This is a vital part of “The Globe” area of the Communicative Theology model. I will spend a few moments reviewing some of the highlights on the sheets on the global network society and the Net Generation. I will suggest some aspects of these fact sheets that are critical for understanding the other factors listed.

I have also selected two content arenas (world-wide poverty and the fall of patriarchalism, or patriarchy), that are largely impacted by the realities of the global network society. These two areas, I propose, have much meaning for your work as theologians and teachers. Hopefully, you will have some thoughts and reflections sparked by all these data. I will conclude with a few thoughts about the impact of all of this on how we learn today – in classrooms and outside of them. This is a serious challenge for theology professors; I am sure you have felt it already. These fact sheets can serve as the basis for wider discussions among your colleagues and in your classrooms so people can share insights, reactions, or anxieties that are real in your own part of the globe.

You will see the fact sheets are not like a text to be read from beginning to end; they are reference sheets for your further reflection. It is important to note, especially with the Castells data, that this material describes what is; it is not a commentary upon what should be. Based on wide-ranging sources, these data describe the reality of “the information age.”

**Reflection on Fact Sheets in Appendices**

1. The Network Society and its Implications
2. Note especially: Technology Aspects #1; Project of the Self #2, 3
3. The Net Generation (Net Geners): Note #1, 4, 12, 26
4. Poverty: Note #6, 9, Africa #10-14; America #15-20
5. Global Decline of Patriarchalism (Patriarchy): Note #1, 8, 10, 13, 18, 20
Conclusion: Churches Must Face the Challenge of a Global Digital Culture

Over the centuries, churches have invested heavily in many different media – oral storytelling, manuscripts of the scriptures (and church tradition), scriptoria and libraries, print publications, and extraordinary educational efforts bringing literacy to billions. In the twentieth century, many churches early recognized the life-altering impact of film and television; the Catholic Church issued several documents on communication and had Popes who became media icons.

During these centuries, churches focused primarily on using media as channels for “the message” – as an evangelizing tool. Today, seductive entertainment stories, computerized social networks, and a ‘talk-back’ digital reality require a new kind of a church/communication strategy to supplement traditional measures. Computer and communication technologies have merged into huge but highly personalized networks.

These webs of relationships and interactivity are new challenges for church ministries.

- Today we understand better that audiences interpret media messages. Meanings are constructed interactively. It is clear an audience’s understanding of a message’s meaning may differ from what the originators intended. Church members must be schooled to be more acutely aware of this.

- Multimedia and multi-sensorial communication challenge print- and text-based transmission and the producer-centered construction of meanings.

- There are many new ways of communicating today. Media are no longer considered simply instruments of transmission; media are integral to the meaning and construction of culture.

- Popular culture is individualized, interactive, and often ideological; this culture captivates huge audiences globally. Today’s religious people must be re-schooled in the cultural aspects of our media work.

- In the past churches have often used writing as a means of democratization and peace. In the digital age churches should oppose using media for the total secularization of culture, for violence, and for control by commercial or military forces.

- This is a reason to not remain wedded to communication systems of the past. Instead we need to make digital communications an integral part of worship, education, social action, and spiritual formation. The absence of churches from the forces shaping the
development of digital communications leaves a huge void in the present global culture of the digital age.

- Churches have been concerned with the truthfulness of their message, depending upon the Holy Spirit for the message to take root in human souls. Now, however, religious people face a ‘talk-back’ mediated world. Churches need to respect this dialogue and re-tool their communication-training efforts to prepare individuals, both technically and psychologically, to engage in genuine dialogue using diverse new media.

A new digital communication system and a new way of forming church- and communication-personnel for this digital reality must emerge and mature in the twenty-first century.

References


Appendices

*Communicative Theology and the Digital Culture of Students*
*College Theology Society/2009*

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Fact Sheet/The Net Generation (Net Geners)

(This information, compiled by Frances Forde Plude, is derived mainly from grown up digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World, by Don Tapscott, author of the earlier important work Wikinomics).

These data are based on a $4 million research project, funded by large corporations to get a factual profile of Net Geners (who are potential employees and clients/customers). 10,000 people were interviewed globally, 40 reports were produced, and several conferences were held. A global network of 140,000 Net Geners hosted a series of discussions.

These research results indicate that Net Geners are unique in many ways, but the current stereotypes are dangerously distorted.

1. Net Geners range from ages 11 to 31 (in 2008). They outnumber the Baby Boomers and were the first group bathed in the digital culture. They represent 81.1 million individuals, 27% of the U.S population.

2. As employees and managers they work collaboratively (influenced by working in teams as video gamers) and they collapse rigid hierarchies.

3. As consumers they want to customize the products they buy; thus, brands, like Apple, must allow for this product adaptation.

4. In education they want to change the model from a teacher-focused approach to student-based collaborative learning – the 2.0 school. They like peer projects. They value networking relationships, even in learning.

5. As citizens, Net Geners are transforming elections and how citizen-responsive governance is managed – democracy 2.0.

6. U.S. youth have access to 200 plus cable TV networks, 5,500 magazines, 10,500 radio stations, and 40 billion Web pages. 22,000 books are published annually. Global video game sales will be $46.5 billion by 2010.


10. This group has a need for speed; they are comfortable multi-taskers.

11. They are innovators and often initiate new products, new ways of thinking. Net Geners are the first *global* generation.

12. Net Geners view the Internet as *connection, conversation*, not only information. They *produce* Net materials (blogs, video, personal sites).

13. By 2007, 72% of 13- to 17-year-olds in the U.S. had mobile phones. This is the medium where most Net Gen action occurs.

14. Net Geners value *integrity*. Many download music, but they claim, in response, that the industry needs to update its business model.

15. This group is service oriented. The Internet has given them a tool for easily connecting globally for social action and global relationships.

16. Over 80% of Net Geners feel more *entitled* than youth of ten years ago; there is a workplace clash; (half of senior management will retire in the next few years). Youthful innovative creativity will change the workplace.

17. As consumers, Net Geners turn to networks of friends online rather than traditional advertising sources. Consumer advocacy and customer review sites guide product and film choices.

18. Cheap video editing software and simpler interface tools feed the Net Geners’ passion for modifying web pages, products, and work sites.

19. Many Net Geners have ‘umbrella parents’ who exercised oversight, often restricted them from ‘strangers’ so youth found freedom online. They feel close to parents, often live at home longer than previous generations. They prefer a more ‘open’ family, more collaborative, less authoritative.

20. They have been called ‘a political juggernaut.’ They are one-fifth of overall voters; by 2015, when all are old enough to vote they will be one-third of the voting public. They ‘speak’ and vote with networked tools.

22. These youth prefer a more ‘open’ family, more collaborative, less authoritative. This culture will infuse other institutions also.

23. Youth volunteering has increased; network tools empower global activism and Net Gen creativity fuels this passion to ‘connect’ with others.

24. Net Geners are surrendering their privacy (on You Tube, Facebook, etc.); these tools are used in job searches (by employers and Net Geners).

25. In the first week of the release of the video game Grand Theft Auto IV, it sold $500 million worth of games – more than 11 of the top movies in the past 13 years made in the entire year of their release. It is a violent action-adventure game. Yet, the number of serious violent offenses committed by persons 12 to 17 declined 61 percent from 1993 to 2005.

26. As the Net Generation grows in influence, the trend will be toward networks, not hierarchies, toward open collaboration rather than command, toward consensus rather than arbitrary rule, and toward enablement rather than control. This does not mean hierarchies will vanish completely. Society still needs authority and control in various areas.

Fact Sheet/The Network Society And Its Implications

[Compiled by Frances Forde Plude from The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, 3 vols, by Manuel Castells, 2nd ed.]

“Toward the end of the second millennium of the Christian era, several events of historical significance transformed the social landscape of human life… an (information) technological revolution … globally interdependent economies … social changes like the global decline of patriarchalism… networked social activism… search for identity.”

Technology Aspects

1. The informational, global economy brings a new organizational logic (the network enterprise) with the new technological paradigm: flexible production, industrial cooperation, global and local social alliances.

2. The current technological transformation (2,700 years after the introduction of the alphabet) is of a similar historical dimension—the formation of a hypertext and a meta-language which integrates written, oral, and audiovisual modalities of networked human and data communication.
3. The interactive “technologies of freedom”, cited by Pool, were initiated by governments: French Minitel and the American ARPANET.

4. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) networks presents an openness in the system that allows constant innovation and accessibility.

Economic Realities

1. Informationalism alters the managerial transformation of labor and production. “Myths” of post-industrialism and the service economy have morphed into the informational society, changing employment structures.

2. New technologies allow small businesses to find market niches; this also empowers self-employment and a mixed employment status like flex time.

3. Foreign direct investment drives globalization more than trade. Intra-firm trade represents the equivalent of about 32 percent of world trade.

4. Information technology replaces work that can be encoded in a programmable sequence, but it enhances work requiring analysis, decision-making, and reprogramming capabilities.

5. There is no systematic structural relationship between the diffusion of information technologies and the evolution of employment levels in the whole economy. The specific outcome of the interaction between information technology and employment is largely dependent upon macro-economic factors, economic strategies, and sociopolitical contexts.

The Project of the Self

1. *Legitimating identity* is introduced by dominant institutions (churches, etc.) and generates a civil society. *Identity for resistance* (perhaps the most important) constructs forms of collective resistance. *Project identity* produces *subjects* (the desire of being an individual with a personal history).

2. Giddens says *self-identity is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her/his biography* (“the project of the self”). Nation-state, fundamentalisms, and activism by groups are all identity related.

3. People globally resent the loss of control over their lives, nations, and the environment. Examples: al-Qaeda and anti-globalization movements.
4. National identity is kept in the collective memory of groups.

5. One of the most powerful states in the history of humankind (the Soviet Union) was not able, after 74 years, to create a new national identity.

Social Change and Activism

1. In all societies, humankind has existed in, and acted through, a symbolic environment. A key feature of multimedia is that they capture most cultural expressions, in all their diversity.

2. Networks constitute the new social morphology; the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture.

3. Information is the key ingredient of our social organization; flows of messages and images between networks constitute the basic thread of our social structure. Social activism groups are empowered by the Net.

Institutional/Individual Adaptations

1. Time is a scarce resource. There are indications that, in the U.S., leisure time decreased by 37 percent between 1973 and 1994.

2. Today’s communication system radically transforms space and time, the fundamental dimensions of human life. The “space of flows” and “timeless time” are the material foundations of a new age.

Fact Sheet/Global Decline Of ‘Patriarchalism’ (Patriarchy)

[Compiled by Frances Forde Plude from The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, 3 vols, by Manuel Castells, 2nd ed.]

“Patriarchalism is a founding structure of all contemporary societies … characterized by the institutionally enforced authority of males over females and their children in the family unit…. The patriarchal family, the cornerstone of patriarchalism, is being challenged … by the inseparably related processes of the transformation of women’s work and the transformation of women’s consciousness.” 192
1. In the late twentieth century we have witnessed what amounts to a mass insurrection of women globally against their oppression.

2. The challenge to patriarchalism is one of the most powerful factors presently inducing fundamentalist movements aimed at restoring the patriarchal order.

3. There is a transformation of personality in our society, resulting from the transformation of family structure and of sexual norms. This is interaction between the network society and the power of identity, transforming us.

4. Social and economic factors impact the changing family structure: the dissolution of households by divorce or separation; delay in coupling; partnerships outside marriage; increasing variation in family units; and increasing autonomy of women in their reproductive behavior.

5. The divorce rate more than doubled between 1971 and 1990 in the UK, France, Canada, and Mexico. One Muslim country studied had a higher divorce rate in 1990 than that of Italy, Mexico, or Japan. In the U.S., the divorce rate per 100 marriages rose from 42.3 in 1970 to 54.8 in 1990.

6. By the 1990s, the percentage of single households oscillates between 20 percent and 39.6 percent of all households (24.5 percent for the U.S.).

7. Children born out of wedlock in the U.S. result as much from poverty and lack of education as from women’s self-affirmation.

8. In the U.S., women’s labor participation rate went up from 51.1 percent in 1973 to 70.5 percent in 1994.

9. In most of the world, labor majority is still agricultural (but not for long). Thus, most women still work in agriculture (80 percent of economically active women in sub-Saharan Africa, and 60 percent in southern Asia).

10. There is a direct correspondence between the type of services linked to informationalization of the economy and the expansion of women’s employment in advanced countries. In the U.S. and the UK, 85 percent of the female labor force is in service industries.

11. The supposed submissiveness of women workers is an enduring myth; however, teachers and nurses globally have mobilized in defense of their demands with greater vehemence than male-dominated steel or chemical workers’ union in recent times.
12. Probably the most important factor in inducing the expansion of women’s employment is their flexibility as workers. Women account for the bulk of part-time and temporary employment and for a growing share of self-employment.

13. As women’s financial contribution becomes a decisive factor in household budgets, female bargaining power in the household increases significantly.

14. As women’s identity is redefined, what is negated is woman’s identity as defined by men and enshrined in the patriarchal family.

15. There is a fundamental commonality underlying the diversity of global feminism: the effort to redefine womanhood in direct opposition to patriarchalism.

16. A key development from the 1980s onwards is the extraordinary rise of grassroots organizations, most enacted and led by women, in the metropolitan areas of the developing world. This massive, networked action is transforming women’s consciousness and social roles, even in the absence of an articulated feminist ideology.

17. The feminist movement globally display different shapes and orientations, depending upon the cultural, institutional, and political contexts in which it arises. The strength and vitality of the feminist movement lies in its diversity, in its adaptability to cultures and ages.

18. What is at issue is not the disappearance of the family but its profound diversification, and the change in its power system.

19. The feminist global picture varies. In Europe, in every single country, there is a pervasive presence of feminism. There is a widespread feeling in Russian society that women could play a decisive role in rejuvenating leadership. In industrialized Asia, patriarchalism still reigns, barely challenged.

20. The ability or inability of feminist and sexual identity social movements to institutionalize their values will depend on their relationship to the state, the last apparatus of patriarchalism throughout history.
Fact Sheet/Poverty

[Compiled by Frances Forde Plude mainly from data in The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, by Manuel Castells.]

1. There are several processes of social differentiation: inequality, polarization, poverty, and misery.

2. Social exclusion creates poverty, barring certain individuals from work.

3. In the past three decades there has been increasing inequality and polarization in the distribution of wealth.

4. In 1998, assets of the 3 richest people in the world were more than the combined GNP of 48 least developed countries, with 600 million people.

5. Since 1980 there has been a dramatic surge in economic growth in 15 countries. But over much of this period, economic decline, or stagnation has affected 100 countries, reducing the incomes of 1.6 billion people, more than a quarter of the world’s population.

6. At the turn of the millennium over one third of humankind was living at subsistence or below subsistence level.

7. In the mid-90s about 840 million people were illiterate; more than 1.2 billion lacked access to safe water; 800 million lacked access to health services; and more than 800 million suffered hunger.

8. Women and children suffer most from poverty: In 1995, 160 million children under five were malnourished, and the maternal mortality rate was about 500 women per 100,000 live births.

9. In Russia, the CIS countries and Eastern Europe, the World Bank in 1999 estimated that 147 million people there lived below the poverty line of four dollars a day. In 1989 the figure was 14 million.

10. In 1950, Africa accounted for over 3 percent of world exports; in 1990, for about 1.1 percent.

11. The continent of Africa suffers from lack of infrastructure, being robbed of its resources, predatory states, huge indebtedness, and aid dependency. (In 1990, Africa was receiving 30% of all global aid).
12. Today there are more than 3.3 billion mobile-phone subscriptions worldwide; there are at least three billion people who do not own cellphones, the bulk of them in Africa and Asia.

13. In Sub-Saharan Africa, urban unemployment doubled between 1975 and 1990, rising from 10 to 20 percent. African food production has declined substantially, making many countries vulnerable to famine, epidemics.

14. By the mid-1990s, Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for about 60 percent of the estimated 17 million HIV-positive people in the world. Poverty limits access to information and to preventive methods.

15. In 1999, 80 percent of American households, or 217 million people, had seen their share of national income decline, from 56 percent in 1977 to under 50 percent.

16. The median percentage contribution of working wives grew from 26 percent of family income in 1979 to 32 percent in 1992; household structure became a major source of income difference between families.

17. College-educated men with 1-5 years of experience saw their hourly wages decline by 10.7 percent in 1979-1995.

18. In 1999 the top fifth of the U.S. population accounted for 50.4% of total income, while the lowest fifth accounted for just 4.2 percent.

19. In the U.S., the percentage of persons with income below the poverty line increased from 11.1 percent in 1973 to 13.3 percent in 1997, that is, over 35 million Americans, two-thirds of whom are white, and rural.

20. In 1993, 38.6 percent of all female-headed families in the U.S. were living in poverty. 19.9 percent of U.S. children were in poverty.

21. Overall, in the global network society, the traditional form of work, based on full-time employment, clear-cut occupational assignments, and a career pattern over the life-cycle is being slowly but surely eroded away (except in Japan.) This new pattern applies mostly to women who fill most part-time or temporary jobs.

22. Dambisa Moyo, a Zambia native, former World Bank consultant, urges investment in Africa instead of aid programs in her book Dead Aid.
23. Nancy Krieger, Harvard professor, notes that the level of income inequality we allow represents our answer to an important question: “What kind of society do we want to live in?”

24. The microloan Grameen Bank started the careers of more than 250,000 “phone ladies” in Bangladesh setting up shop as their village phone operator, with small commissions as people make and receive calls.

25. In some countries poor people are using their cell phones for banking (moving funds to pay for crops, etc.).
Building The Listening Church Pope Francis Wants

By Frances Forde Plude

In my cover article in America magazine (April 4, 2016), I describe the desire expressed by Pope Francis to the 2016 Synod of Bishops on the Family. He said we must not only hold synods; we must become a synodal church – a listening community of faith.

How can we call upon the riches of both theology and communication studies (along with leadership studies) to empower listening among all ‘people of God?’

How can we enrich the sense of community within U.S. parishes faced with dwindling congregations, the absence of youth, aging and overburdened clerics, and parishioners who attend for Mass and Communion and then hurry home, often not interacting much with others?

A significant model has been developed by Matthias Scharer, emeritus professor at the University of Innsbruck. Scharer worked closely for years with Bernd Jochen Hilberath, professor at the University of Tübingen in developing Communicative Theology workshops. These are based on the pedagogy of the late Ruth Cohn who urged that we help every individual within varied groups to recognize every person’s right to be their own chairperson. This can help prevent the domination of people, seen in Hitler’s vision and prevalent even today around the globe.

Here is one possibility…

What if we organized a project to develop a model workshop for U.S. faith leaders based on the above model? Funding could be sought to support gatherings based in Retreat Centers throughout the U.S.

This offers the following advantages:

- People attracted to retreat settings are prayerful, often leaders
- This removes the experience from academia, sometimes rigid
- The possibility exists that the group could be ecumenical
- This could train people to return and enrich their local congregations
VIII. Readings
A Communication/Theology Annotated Bibliography

By Frances Forde Plude

[This bibliography was published in Conversations in media, religion and culture, Sophia Marriage and Jolyon Mitchel, eds., Edinburgh: T&T Clark and Continuum, 2003.]

Theology, popular culture, audience-reception studies, and communication systems are converging. Some writers believe a Communication Theology is emerging from this movement. Listed here are some helpful resources, establishing a foundation for Communication Theology. As this new field of thought develops the scholarship below should help with the challenge of ministry in a wired world of local theologies and cultural pluralism.

E. Arens, Christopraxis: A Theology of Action (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995)

A work that builds upon the social-scientifically and -philosophically oriented theory of action developed by Jürgen Habermas. Arens discusses intersections of communicative theory of action and biblical foundations of a theological theory of action.

Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication, Media, Religion and Culture newsletter (St. John’s University, Bangkok, www.stjohn.ac.th/arc)

This is a valuable link to websites and research underway throughout Asia.


Beaudoin, himself a member of Generation X, explores fashion, music videos, and cyberspace and concludes that his generation has fashioned a theology radically different from but no less potent or valid than that of their elders.


The book’s thesis is that iconoclasm comes in many kinds (Pagan, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Secular), but is always religious in one manner or another. It also includes a wide-ranging study of iconophilia and iconoclasm in the West.

Explores the distinctive sense of God in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. It notes the importance of information process and systems behavior for the analysis of religious belief, applying information systems analysis to religion studies.


H. Campbell and J. Mitchell (eds.), *Interactions: Theology Meets Film, TV and the Internet* (Centre for Theology and Public Issues, Edinburgh, 1999)

This journal explores a spiritual renaissance in popular culture, film, TV and the Internet. It also includes information about the Media and Theology Project at New College, University of Edinburgh.


This work helped to establish the ground for cultural approaches to the study of communication and modern society.


A series of essays on the work of the Protestant lay theologian, Jacques Ellul. The volume includes an extensive bibliography of Ellul’s works and an Epilogue by Ellul.
H. De Vries and Samuel Weber (eds.), Religion and Media (Stanford University Press, California, 2001)

Twenty-five contributors to this volume – who include Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Talad Asad, and James Siegel – confront the conceptual, analytical, and empirical difficulties involved in addressing the complex relationship between religion and media.

A. Dulles, The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System (Crossroad, New York, 1992)

The author explores theology as symbolic communication and seeks a dynamic equilibrium between continuity and innovation. He explores the cultural-linguistic aspects of theology and notes that religions are predominately characterized by their symbols.


In the chapter ‘The Church and Communications: Vatican II and Beyond’ Dulles notes that a theology of communication is connected to ecclesiology. His five models include: hierarchical; herald; sacramental; communio; and that of church studying the signs of the times.


This volume contains all basic documents of the Catholic Church on Social Communication, including messages from the Pope on World Communication Days from 1967-1996. Eilers provides a helpful introduction for each document and a document text-numbering system making discussion easy.


A text for the introduction of social communication for ministry leaders based on a training program developed by the author. Helpful suggested readings and Appendices. Included is a chapter on video planning for churches.

Helpful information about sharing knowledge, sentiments, and experience by people of different cultures, moving from ethnocentrism to mutual respect. The author notes his interactive perspective ‘is developed from Carey’s cultural view while the theological basis is derived from Kierkegaard’s concept of indirect communication.’


This volume examines the nature of true dialogue through an analysis of the historical development of attitudes towards communicative practices of Christian churches, particularly the Catholic Church.

T. Farrell and P. Soukup (eds.), *Communication and Lonergan: Common Ground for Forging the New Age* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1993)

An interdisciplinary attempt to explore how Lonergan’s thought might apply to communication. Approaches include rhetoric; ‘intercultural communication; interpretation; interpersonal communication; postmodernist questions; and the ways in which communication interacts with culture.’ A helpful glossary of Lonerganian terminology is included.


This document outlines interfaces and gives sources, determinants, or horizons, concepts and categories, and frameworks for future study for each interface. The five are: theology and communication; communicative theology; systematic theology of communication; pastoral theology of communication; and Christian moral vision of communication.


Ranging from the religious themes in cowboy fiction to Madonna’s ‘Like a Prayer’, from televangelism to the world of sports, contributors offer insights into what popular culture reveals about the nature of American religion today.


This volume explores the symbolic environment in the U.S. created by the TV culture and how media challenge the communication of religious values.


This book is ‘an attempt to understand the transformation and dispersal of the sacramental functions of images in a secular and pluralistic society.’ Goethals moves from high art to the advertisements on television in her exploration of the making of meaning and myths through visual media.

P. Granfield (ed.), *The Church and Communication* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1994)

Viewing the centrality of communication in the Catholic Church, this volume covers various themes: dialogue and participation; the communicative dimension of ecumenism; evangelization; the status of church communicators; and how interactive technologies are a metaphor for a more dialogic church.


The author develops a theology of popular culture and speaks of a theology of religious imagination. Many examples are media-based.


In Chapter 3 Häring outlines a communication theology, along with a discussion of the mass media and the new situation presented by media.

J. Healey and D. Sybertz (eds.), *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1996)

This work deals with the challenge of inculturation in Africa today and describes the characteristics of a local African narrative theology of inculturation. Jesus is placed within the African context of healer, brother-intercessor, and victor over death.


The author uses Robert Kegan’s theorizing and participatory action research as a structure. She analyzes mass-mediated popular culture as a transformative resource for religious education in an age of pluralism.


An analysis of religious television in the light of the new religious consciousness in America, with special emphasis on Pat Robertson. A concluding chapter concerns the impact of the electronic church on American culture.


These significant essays show ‘there is a substantive, ontological, and authentic dimension to meaning making that accompanies media behavior.’ The authors do not argue that media constitute religion, but that media play a quasi-religious role in everyday life. There is a valuable bibliographical-review chapter and a concluding analysis of areas needing more study in the field.

Topics range from Islam on the Internet to the quasi-religious practices of Elvis fans, from the uses of popular culture by the Salvation Army in its early years to the uses of interactive media technologies at the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance. The issues these essays address include the public/private divide, and the distinctions between the sacred and the profane.


The author writes of the development of religious television and covers research up to that time on effects of paid-time religious programs; the size of the audience; audience characteristics; and the impact on the local church and on American culture.


A review of Chomsky’s work as a model for theological problems with emphasis upon pluralism and God language.


A thoughtful analysis of the changing fortunes of religion in postmodern times.


This work emphasizes the mediation process (defined as ‘the articulation between communication practice and social movements’), rather than media content or ownership. This theory of socio-cultural mediations opens a new approach to audience reception theory. The
author notes: ‘… the receiver in the communication process is not simply a decoder of what the sender has put into the message but is also a producer of meaning.’

J. McDonnell and F. Trampiets (eds.), Communicating Faith in a Technological Age (St Paul Publications, Slough, 1989)


C. Martini, Communicating Christ to the World (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1994)

A series of pastoral letters by the Archbishop of Milan.


The author calls for a communication-centered theology where communication is included in theology – rather than speaking of a ‘theology of communication.’


This volume explores: homiletics; radio history; music videos; British and American religious radio broadcasting; and communication theology. Mitchell investigates what preachers can learn from radio broadcasters in a media age. He stresses the importance of listening and translating public speech into ‘accessible, conversational, and visual’ language.


This finely illustrated book examines the important role that American Protestants played in the formation of visual mass culture between 1820-1920.

One of the first, if not the first, book to examine the important role popular images have played in the formation and maintenance of American religious life.


Recent communication/cultural studies research adds significant insights that go beyond this classic study. His model proposes: Christ Against Culture; The Christ of Culture; Christ Above Culture; Christ and Culture in Paradox (Dualists); and Christ and the Transformation of Culture. The author concludes: the world of culture exists within the world of grace.


Ong says, ‘the Word of God comes … and is present … within an evolving communication system.’


Peters analyses the teachings of Socrates, Jesus, the theology of Saint Augustine, philosophy in the wake of Hegel, and the American tradition from Emerson to William James in relation to understanding communication today.


Entire issue devoted to theology and communication.

Pinsky considers several of the show’s central characters, interviews a number of the show’s writers and producers, and concludes with an examination of whether the show is subversive or supportive of faith.


P. Rossi and P. Soukup (eds.), *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1994)

This collection of essays examines four topics: the context of mass media and moral reflection; moral dimensions of public life; using the media for moral development; and the importance of moral imagining (philosophically and theologically). Gender issues are considered – the shifting roles of women and the media, along with media economics.

J. Raja, *Facing the Reality of Communication: Culture, Church and Communication* (ISPCK, Delhi, 2001)

Drawing both on recent New Testament scholarship on parables and cultural studies findings on reception, Joshva makes a case for re-imaging the nature of Christian communication. He offers signposts for understanding the audience for today’s church.

R. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Orbis, Maryknoll, 1997)

This volume examines the impact of globalization on the contexts of theology, including the impact of new communication technologies. The work includes many communication-related issues such as: codes; cross-cultural issues; hierarchical control; intercultural issues and communication flows. Schreiter is a leader among theologians who are, incorporating communication and cultural studies concepts into his thinking and writing.

This book sets out to offer a ‘perspective on communication that is anchored in a Christian worldview.’ Schultze believes that ‘God created us to be stewards of symbolic reality.’ His use of the stewardship theme is one of the most original elements of his argument.


This is a key review of the literature of theology and communication (as of 1983) and it includes a thoughtful analysis of the growing dialogue between the two fields. Soukup establishes a framework for analysis including the following analogues: linguistic; aesthetic; cultural; dialogic; broadcast/mechanical; and theological. The author summarizes the main questions raised by the literature at this stage. An extensive bibliography is arranged in helpful categories.

P. Soukup (ed.), *Media, Culture and Catholicism* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1996)

These essays highlight ‘a significant shift for theology as it engages culture.’ The volume includes Ong’s important document on ‘Communications Media and the State of Theology,’ Greeley’s analysis of Catholic Imagination concepts, along with other practical applications in liturgy, preaching, pastoral education, and dialogical forums.


A collection of essays on how religious audiences react to and use the mass media.


Divided into three parts, this book first offers theoretical discussion of the interplay between religion and the media of popular culture. The second part describes several world religions’ (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Eastern philosophies) teachings about media use. The third part presents case studies analyzing media uses, including the Southern Baptist’s boycott of Disney products as well as a study of the uses of contemporary Christian music.
Symbolism, Media and the Lifecourse Project (University of Colorado, Boulder)

This is one of the largest on-going research projects in the U.S. on the meaning-making function of individuals and families as they view media

K. Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997)

An exploration of the historical notion of culture and its modern meaning. She then explores theology as a part of culture, interactions between Christian culture and society, commonalities in Christian practice, and issues of diversity and its implications for theological creativity. The author contends that the anthropological notion of culture ‘can be profitably employed in theology, setting new questions and new directions for theological research.’


This work attempts to show ‘that Christian stories provide the central and distinctive strength and content of Christian faith.’ It constructs a narrative theology for Christians.


The author notes that the problem of religion and culture ‘has always been the center of my interest.’ The religious dimension appears in many spheres of cultural activity and he adds that ‘this dimension, and not any ecclesiastical control of cultural creativity’ is what he means by ‘theology of culture.’

Recent Work In Communication And Theology: A Report

By Paul A. Soukup, S.J.

[Presented to the 4th International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture, Louisville, KY September 1-4, 2004.]

Theology occupies a small, but distinct, corner within the larger intersection of communication and religion, an intersection that encompasses sociological investigations, individual uses, institutional productions, popular culture phenomena, and much more. Theology, as the systematic reflection on belief or faith practices, seeks understanding of both individual commitments and corporate actions. And so, theological investigations often begin from materials within the faith tradition, such as the Scriptures, or from cultural practices, such as worship. At other times, theology seeks to understand faith through a dialogue with culture or learning, something apparent in the long association of theology with philosophy. Here, in these places, we find the theological interest in communication.

The interest grows up in two distinct, but related ways. On the one hand, theology follows the path made familiar with philosophy and locates, in communication study, a lens through which it can view and understand contemporary life and culture. In so doing, it hopes to better understand faith, personal commitment, and ecclesial life. On the other hand, churches look to theology to make sense of the communication culture and, particularly with an applied area like communication, to guide church action.

Christian churches have long employed communication media—stretching back to writing and mosaics, if we want to go back that far, or to technologies like the printing press from the 16th century. The last century raised the churches’ awareness of communication technology as groups produced films, set up radio stations, and developed television ministries. That growth in audiovisual technologies, much more than any expansion of printed resources, led to repeated calls for theological reflection on communication.

Perhaps the most prominent of these calls for theological reflection on communication media came from the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council on Social Communication. In *Communio et Progressio*, an instruction commissioned by the Second Vatican Council, the group writes, “The whole question of social communications deserves attention from theologians particularly in the areas of moral and pastoral theology... This will be more readily achieved when theologians have studied the suggestions in the First Part of this Instruction [on theological principles] and enriched them with their research and insight” (1971, para. 108). Similar calls came from the World Council of Churches (1968) and, more recently, from the World Evangelical Fellowship (Adeney, Bennett, Mudditt, McCaskill, McCaskill, Nichols, & Thatcher, 1997).
Many of the requests for theological evaluation stemmed from a perceived need for guidance in the face of a media culture and of growing religious involvement with mass communication. The rise of the (mostly evangelical) televangelists on cable television in the United States prompted a good deal of concern among the non-evangelical denominations (Horsfield, 1984), which, in turn, led to calls for more theological work. Early theological interest in communication, then, followed several courses. Jorgenson (n.d.) classifies World Council of Churches’ statements into the broad theological themes of evangelization, education (especially for peace), and ethics. Soukup (1983) proposed four dimensions: religious self-understanding, Christian attitudes towards communication, pastoral crises of communication, and ethics and society (p. 21). Many of the earlier theological writings about communication, however, tended to take a purely instrumental view of communication, one criticized by Hamelink (1975), among others, as insufficient to understand either communication or culture. Some historical studies highlight a kind of corrective: they note that concerns for what we would today classify as communication media (images, texts, church decor) did elicit nuanced theological responses and rationales in the fifth, ninth, and 16th centuries, from Christian theologians like Augustine, John of Damascus, Gregory the Great, Martin Luther, and Ullrich Zwingli.

Churches or theologians reflecting on communication media, practices, or products tells only part of the story. As a consciousness of communication grew in the later 20th century, theologians began to use the tools and ideas developed in understanding human communication as part of their own repertoire to seek a better understanding of God and of God’s action in creation. Thus, where theologians and communication scholars address one another’s concerns in the later 20th century, they fall into seven general categories: (1) pastoral theology, communicating the Christian message or supporting communication among believers; (2) applied theology, answering questions about communication using theological categories (for example should churches use television?); (3) applying theological categories (trinity, incarnation) to communication in an effort to understand communication; (4) using communication tools to analyze religious texts; (5) examining communication as a context for theology; (6) using communication content (film, television, music) to prompt religious reflection; and (7) using communication constructs to inform theological reflection.

This ordering of the general categories is somewhat arbitrary; I have also tried to organize this report from the more typical or more predictable, to the more original. In this paper, then, I shall review each of the areas and introduce some of the more recent work at those intersections of communication and theology. While this review cannot be all encompassing, it will at least introduce some representative examples of the recent work.
1. Pastoral Theology: Communicating the Christian Message

Among other things, pastoral theology addresses questions of applied communication: How should churches or individuals proclaim the Christian message? What communicative forms best suit religious education? How do people talk about spiritual matters? Where communication study and theology meet here, the typical encounter has theology borrowing the practical advice offered by communication.

Not surprisingly, many writers examine evangelization. Rose, Sander, and Kayser (1998) emphasize the proclamation of the gospel as giving voice to the oppressed. They choose the sender-message-receiver model of communication but insist that theological analysis and priorities (liberation, for example) must precede any actual choice of communication media (p. 267). Using a similar sending and receiving information model, Puloka (1998) emphasizes the need for contextualization in support of evangelization. Dalton (1999) and Flemming (2002) make similar arguments for contextualization, and both use the example of Paul’s preaching in Athens to anchor their analyses. Dalton compares Paul’s “communication principles”–critically engage the content of the culture, use the language and discourse of the culture, and know and proclaim the Gospel message (pp. 18-21)–with the practice of G. Ernest Thomas, a well-known Methodist preacher. Flemming cites Paul’s Areopagus address as a model of both contextualization and awareness of one’s audience. Writing like Puloka from the context of the South Pacific, Teinaore (2001) stresses not only preaching but also witnessing for effective evangelization.

Raja (2000, 2001) presents a carefully developed theology of proclamation for India, basing his thinking on the World Council of Churches’ Uppsala statement and on Kierkegaard’s model of indirect communication. He notes, “Christian communication is not primarily information about doctrines or about the churches’ activities or about Christian faith. It is the process of sharing the experience of God’s involvement in people’s lives and interpreting the gospel through all forms of communication” (2000, p. 100). He suggests a contextualization that makes “use [of] the communicative forms that are shared by the audience” (p. 103), in this instance, Hindu forms and musical instruments. These can take their place alongside the more traditional Christian forms of worship and service. Beginning with the parables of Jesus, Raja (2001) develops the argument in more detail, citing not only Kierkegaard (on indirect communication) but also James Carey (on communication as ritual) and Paolo Freire (on the pedagogy of the oppressed).

Sorenson (2000) looks more explicitly at religious ritual as a means of communication. Calling ritual a “universal mode for communicating about the meaning of life and the nature of divine and human powers” (pp. 119-120), he asks, “Is theology involved when Latter-day Saints participate in these rituals? Virtually every principle and concept of the gospel are brought to attention, either explicitly or by reflection, by the repertoire of rites” (p. 123). Ultimately, he
argues for the *lex orandi, lex credendi* and notes that increased use of rituals has replaced theologizing in the LDS Church as it has expanded and encompasses increasing cultural diversity. Schwier (1998) also stresses ritual. However, he takes a “ritual as language” approach within worship. He argues for the progression from perception to context to the theological concept.

Communication practice also plays its role in religious education. Steinmann (1997) reports a survey of the understandings of theological terminology in adult Bible study classes, noting that simplicity of language leads to greater effectiveness. Wimberly (1996) develops a theoretical model for the use of narrative and storytelling in African American religious education. Building on the strong oral traditions in the culture, she argues, “the narrative paradigm involves both remembering the personal and cultural story and re-membering a faithful and hope-filled community that is guided by God's Story… Narrative is to be shared” (p. 318).

Such pastoral use of stories is another kind of contextualization, as it builds on the existing resources and practices of the community. Jordan (2001), in contrast, stresses not narrative but nonverbal communication as an integral part of theological education. Knippenberg (1998) publishes a series of essays from a conference on spiritual counseling and spiritual direction. Drawing heavily on the psychological side of communication research, the contributors wrestle with what happens when people communicate, how people communicate, what those communication patterns means for religious/spiritual/theological understanding. The group also concerns itself with the wider sense of communication: community, ritual, and interpersonal interaction. Rossi and Soukup (1994) offer a series of essays that address moral theology from a communication perspective. While contributors approach the subject in different ways, the unifying theme is the “moral imagination,” particularly as that imagination is formed by and through the mass media. In each of these areas of pastoral concern (evangelization, ritual, education, counseling, moral theology), communication plays a central role and pastoral theologians have not hesitated to look to communication studies to form a theological approach.

2. Pastoral Theology: Using Communications Media

Pastoral theology also addresses what we might term policy questions for the churches: Should they, or how should they, use the mass media? How might Christians evaluate media productions? What theological principles guide these choices? Although such questions occupied a great deal of theological attention in the 1980s, when the rise of televangelism in the United States challenged the non-Evangelical churches the issue has received less attention in recent years.

The most detailed analysis by far comes from Hoover (1993). Writing as part of a symposium for the Mennonite *Conrad Grebel Review*, Hoover, with degrees in both theology and
communication studies, provides an overview of communication as well as a careful consideration of the church’s position. First, he reminds us how people interact with the media: A critical point here is that this relationship, between people and media, is entirely a volitional one. The paradigm shift that has taken media theory and cultural theory away from notions of the “direct effects” of messages on their “audiences” toward a view that stresses audience autonomy and action, leads to this inescapable proposition. People live on the media “map” because they want to, and more importantly, because that map is an authentic one for them. They do not see the media in the dualistic terms Muggeridge did or Fore does (pp. 98-99).

Hoover then sketches the various ways that Christian churches use the media before he turns to options for the Anabaptists. In offering these options, he grounds the discussion in the theological values of the church. Admittedly, there are many barriers to Anabaptists coming to adapt to the style and approach of the televangelists. And it is that First, technology, particularly media technology, has long been problematic for Anabaptist groups. Coming to accept and adopt these devices carries with it today the same sort of dangers and challenges it always has.

The Second, that Anabaptist groups tend to be deliberative and communitarian in discipline and organization. Surrendering to one-man (and media figures tend to be men—another critical issue), power and control to “tell our story” would be a major break with tradition and practice. Third, while Anabaptists do believe in personal transformation, we also have held that this must take place in the context of community to be authentic… Fourth, we have not traditionally sought cultural or social acceptance, much less ascendance and power. The fact the media are largely used for promotion of symbols of power and control makes the media environment one that seems basically at odds with who we are. Fifth, the kind of almost mercenary pragmatism demonstrated by those are successful in the media seems also to run counter to some basic Anabaptist social and spiritual precepts. We want to be open to all. to many positions and perspectives. To eliminate any simply because they do not “work” in the media seems to be a confusion of priorities. Finally, we would be unlikely to adapt to a mythology of the media that would put seemingly “mechanistic” approaches to community and discourse ahead of “authentic” (p. 105). This essay provides a good model for the kinds of discussion and debate within pastoral theology about church use of the media.

The same issue of the Conrad Grebel Review publishes a talk by Roman Catholic theologian Gregory Baum (1993), who notes that Christian attitudes toward the world divide between “liberal” and “radical,” with the former being optimistic of inculcating Gospel values in the world while the latter see the Gospel only as a judgment on the world. These attitudes characterize the different Christian churches’ approaches to the media as well. Papathanasiou (1999) addresses the question of church use of the media from the perspective of Orthodoxy. Within a larger context of language and the vernaculars, he concludes that media use is consistent with Christianity; of particular interest is the grounding of his argument in the
example of the saints, who did not hesitate to translate the Scriptures and theology into the languages of the various nations. Peterson (1997) suggests that “public theology” should take a critical perspective on the media and media ownership. This places him more along Baum’s radical axis as he asks, “As the Church attempts to be faithful to such traditional values as equality, justice, and human dignity, what should the Church say in criticism of the dominant value of commercial mass media, which is possessive individualism” (p. 16)?

Finally, a report from the World Evangelical Fellowship theological commission consultation (Adeney, et al., 1997), raises theological concerns about media use, even within a group that has typically led the way for involvement with the mass media. The commission stresses the need for community, understanding God, clarity in language, and a relationship with God. All derive from the theological analysis of how God communicates with us. These five essays illustrate the general approach within pastoral theology to questions of media use.

3. Pastoral Theology: Using Communications Media

A parallel question deals with how the churches should evaluate the media: Is television, for example, harmful to Christian living? Having dealt with television in its 1971 statement, the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Social Communication turned to other media. More recently, it has issued a series of very carefully reasoned statements on ethics in advertising (1997), ethics in communication (2000), and ethics on the Internet (2002). Each statement follows a similar pattern of highlighting the good of the communication media, sketching theological principles (such as community, solidarity, primacy of the human person, 2002, nos. 3-4), and identifying the ethical challenges posed by the media. The statements end with attempts to resolves the ethical problems through appeal to the theological principles.

4. Theological Categories Applied To Communication

Some writers apply theological categories to communication, in the attempt to develop a theological model for communication. One highly developed, and quite typical, example of this approach appears in Communio et Progressio, the 1971 statement of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication. That statement devotes one major section to a theological perspective on communication and includes, for example, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and human community. More recent writers follow this lead. Peterson (2000) proposes a Trinitarian model for communication when he notes that the Trinity is active in creating and advancing communication (p. 17). He illustrates this for each Person of the Trinity: “God said, let there be light.” … Such a basic interpersonal act of communication, simple speech, can have very creative results…. God also created the possibility for mass communication and long-distance communication when he created light. … The Word becoming flesh is also an act of communication, an act of sharing. It was not possible for God to share our experience as human
beings until the Word became flesh. … “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak foreign languages, as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech” (Acts 2:4, ff).

The gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was speech. There are other gifts of the Spirit, but the first gift was the gift of speech in foreign languages. (pp. 18-19). From this, he argues that all human communication should refer to such biblical models. Medhurst (2004) seeks to develop a Christian rhetoric, again by reference to biblical values and models. While not ignoring the traditional rhetorical concerns with audience and context, he looks to the teachings of Jesus for central concepts (love of God and neighbor, service, repentance, faithfulness, peacemaking, reconciliation); to biblical metaphors for figurative language; to the witness of the Church Fathers and 20th century sources like C. S. Lewis, for rhetorical sources.

Kim (1995) also chooses biblical themes in developing a theological understanding of Christian communication. The People of God, or community, flows from such New Testament themes as participation, solidarity, and reconciliation and stands in contrast to the Old Testament loss of linguistic unity at Babel. Such biblically informed communication also works to correct the dangers of Western models and globalization. Kaufmann (1994) chooses a starting point grounded in later theology: that of the sensus fidelium. This concept refers to the collective belief of the Christian community, and he uses it to examine the social role of communication. His general approach is one of sociology of communication, but the theological starting point opens up a consideration of how faith is passed on.

A less typical example of the use of theological categories to illuminate communication practices comes from Boureux (1995) who re-reads Michel Serres in the light of angelology. Serres (1993) likens the role of the mass media to that of the angels in traditional theology. Boureux explores the origins of the concept and proposes that a stronger theological reading of the concept of angels (as divine communication, in the line of Karl Rahner’s theology), develops Serres’ ideas with more coherence. Poole (2003), in contrast, reports an historical investigation of how 17th century linguists/theologians wrestled with questions of the origins and universality of language. Here the theological presuppositions of the interlocutors influenced their reading of the empirical data before them. While Poole does not develop the theological implications of the debate, he does show how scholars of an earlier era used theological concepts in their concerns about language. Each of these writers either proposes or summarizes ways that theologians can understand communication on theological grounds. Others turn the tables and explore how communication studies can lead to a better grasp of theology.

5. Communication Tools: Analyzing Religious Texts

Some communication scholars use the methods of study appropriate to their own disciplines to better understand theology. The first group encompasses primarily rhetoricians who choose to
analyze religious discourse. Apple and Messner (2001) studied the rhetoric of the Christian Identity Movement, a racist group in North America. By applying concepts from apocalyptic and paranoid discourse, they reveal the underlying theological structures in the group’s belief system. Gring (1998) approaches the texts of people’s reflections on revolution in Nicaragua in a similar rhetorical fashion; he, too, makes manifest the theological presuppositions that structured the revolutionary discourse. Litfin (1994) takes on a more ambitious project in his extended study of ancient rhetoric as the background for Pauline discourse. Beginning with 1 Corinthians 1-4, he separates the Pauline theology from the classical and intertestamental period rhetoric, noting how Paul challenges and changes the tradition.

Chase (2003) explores ways “to generate Christian discourses of peace” through an analysis of the rhetorical situation of Christian teaching and the development of two theological principles from the New Testament (the sufficiency of Christ’s death, and the ultimate justice of God’s judgment). He submits each principle to a rhetorical analysis (following Kenneth Burke and René Girard) to craft an argument that carefully integrates communication tools with theology. “The task for Christian rhetors, then, is to take their own theology with utmost seriousness. Christians who enter a global dialogue on peace ought not to soften their commitment to theological principles, but to strengthen it, such that the full implications of the New Testament teaching on sacrifice and judgment saturate their discourse” (p. 134). Though not in the direct ambit of Christian theology, studies of Jewish rhetoric also shed light on the theology that developed out of Judaism. Katz (2003), for example, explicates the rabbinical practice of interpretation, one based on the Hebrew alphabet. These practices come to function as a kind of hidden foundation to later Christian practice.

Rather than rhetoric, Hughes (2001) draws on aesthetics as he contrasts theological exegesis and aesthetic exegesis in his examination of the theology illustrated in medieval art. He acknowledges that medieval artists and viewers knew that “artworks can enhance theological ideas and take them in startlingly original directions or create new ones—all by their own visual devices” (p. 185). Focusing on typology, he shows how the artistic use of this Pauline concept sheds light on medieval theology.

Written in a much earlier period but only published in 1999, Marshall McLuhan’s reflections on religion offer his typical probing, aphoristic analyses, but in these instances devoted to religious communication and practices. McLuhan is certainly one of the most cited authors by theologians interested in communication. Here, we read his own words as he teases out the deeper communication and cultural consequences of religious texts and rituals. The collection includes his essays on the church’s understanding of communication as well as those dealing with liturgy and ritual.
6. Communication: A Context For Theology

McLuhan’s work provides a bridge to a different approach that communication scholars take towards theology. Following his lead in examining the ecology of the media—that is, the environment the media create for human living—they argue that this larger media context has an indirect, but nonetheless, indelible effect on theology as communication media make their imprint on human thought and action. McLuhan expressed these effects and relationship through easily remembered phrases like “the medium is the message” or “the Gutenberg galaxy.” His “global village,” the interaction created by instantaneous communication stands among McLuhan’s enduring ideas.

Schüssler-Fiorenza and Corsani (1993) integrate this concept, together with feminism to create a larger context for reading the Bible. Several others look not so much to the global village as to the impact of the forms of media. Boomershine (1995) argues Christian theology must adjust to the reality of contemporary thought pattens. Instead of continuing to invest our energy, our money and our thought in reinvigorating the forms that have made the gospel boring in electronic culture we could reinvestigate our tradition to discover the forms of the religion that will be meaningful in the communication system of electronic culture and invest our energy in them. The energy of Christian creativity needs to be poured into other forms than the essay and the sermon.

These forms do not comprise the Christian tradition. The Bible, for example, is overwhelmingly composed of forms other than the theological essay, the sermon. The tradition of the Church has many forms—story, sacrament, liturgy, song, prayer, icon, poem, proverb, diatribe—that are directly relevant to this culture and that will work in its communication system. The current renaissance of narrative in virtually every area of Christian thought and ministry—narrative exegesis, narrative theology, narrative preaching pastoral counseling—is a sign of this recognition (p. 97). Boomershine goes on to encourage churches, pastors, and theologians to develop new forms for theology since the context of contemporary human life has changed so. Weber (1993) similarly argues for a homiletic style matched to the electronic culture in which people live. Following the work on oral cultures of Walter Ong, Green (1999) sees the contemporary world as moving towards a return of oral forms; on this basis we must replace “the bourgeois hegemony of religion,” the “‘let-me-explain-the-answers-to-you’ type of religion” (p. 334) in favor of a theological style that better fits oral patterns: experience, analysis, theological reflection, and action.

Soukup (2002) proposes a more sweeping connection between the context of the media and theology, suggesting that communication forms and affects the approach, the context, and the content of theology. Communication also affects theological method and reception; it has the possibility of offering fresh insights into traditional theological questions. In a later article
(Soukup, 2003), he investigates how media forms allow people to substitute one thing for another: the book (Bible) for the temple, information for experience, graphical spaces for ritual places. Soukup, Buckley, and Robinson (2001) argue that similar changes enter the teaching of theology due to digital media. Berger (1996) makes the point more dramatically, following the reflections of Lanham and Birkerts on the digital world to their logical conclusion. The impact of these media will be profound: If, as Lanham and Birkerts so convincingly argue, the electronic media and related rhetorical devices radically alter the way we communicate, even think, how do they affect the way theology is done? The way catechesis is carried out? The way worship is structured and planned?

More fundamentally, how do they modify the authoritative status granted to carefully crafted creeds and confessions (p. 195)? In fact, Berger maintains, such new media will change the nature of the church. They will give the laity a greater prominence in the church, will decentralize church polity, will change religious education, and will even affect pastoral counseling (p. 198). Each of these changes, of course, reflects substantial theological differences from the tradition. Walhout (1994) presents a carefully crafted explanation of how such changes occur by placing Ong’s thought into dialogue with that of Jacques Derrida. After reviewing the challenge posed by Derrida’s thinking, Walhout argues that Ong’s positions, built on his understanding of orality and literacy and on the impact of communicative forms, may help to resolve some of the theological issues.

Two lines of argument are implicit in Ong's work, I believe, even though he does not himself develop them. First, his emphasis on the historicity of thoughts and the history of logic itself, supports the view that metaphysics cannot be built on the foundation of reason alone. Logic and theoretical thought have their own histories and are meaningful in the final analysis in relationship to those histories. This view seems to coincide with Derrida's. However, Derrida’s claim about the limits of language and thought seems to be a claim about the limits of understanding generally; the limits of language and of logical uses of language determine the limits of all theorizing. Ong, in contrast, develops a different line of argumentation, namely, that historical interpretation is heuristically more useful and ultimately more basic to human understanding than the internal coherence of logical systems. (pp. 448-49) This larger, partly rhetorical, and partly interpretive, context allows theology to develop its themes more freely and with greater historical grounding. Communication, both as media and as content, forms the cultural matrix for such theology.

7. Communication: A Source For Religious Reflection

Another general intersection between theology and communication has the theologian look to the popular culture created by the communication industries. Here, the culture provides sources of theological reflection as well as the locus of inculturation for faith and religious practice.
Schultze, Anker, Bratt, Romanowski, Worst, and Zuidervaart (1991) offer a survey of one specific group: youth culture in the electronic media. While they do not specifically address theology, the motivating force for the book is a religious one and they acknowledge as a bias the Reformed Church commitment that they bring. For us this means, among other things, that the world belongs to God, that God created humankind, that humankind’s purpose in life is to magnify the Creator, and that Christians should not only save souls but also transform society and culture for the good of all people. The Reformed tradition especially demonstrates a passionate interest in caring for the whole of creation and culture as an expressive arena for the loving, redemptive action of God. Today that arena includes popular culture, especially the popular entertainment distributed through the mass media (p. x).

The book itself provides a history of popular culture and the ongoing presence of religion and popular religious movements, a review of the entertainment industry, and examinations of popular music, music television, teen films, popular art, and leisure culture. Schultze (2002) continues this kind of work with a detailed consideration of the information society as the cultural matrix for religious understanding and practice. Hess (1993) endorses such approaches, terming them a “hermeneutic of popular culture” and seeing them as a condition for the possibility of theology. Beaudoin (1998) raises theological questions more explicitly as he examines the faith of Generation X. He, too, provides a reading of popular culture and suggests that it forms the theological sensibility of contemporary young people in the United States. His work, like that of Schultze and his colleagues, tries to open a place for popular culture within theological understanding.

Film studies represents one area that holds continuing interest for theologians. Many regard films as an ideal medium that implicitly engages in theological debate; others take film to be theological in their very nature. May’s (1997) collection presents essays that articulate a variety of theoretical positions on the religious and theological dimensions of film, some situated in aesthetics, some in narrative, and some in the specific kinds of consciousness induced by the film going experience. May (2001) takes a different approach, this time using the Apostles’ Creed as a theological lens through which to experience film. In this work he suggests specific films to view in conjunction with the various parts of the creed.

Malone and Pacatte (2001, 2002, 2003) similarly tie films to specific faith statements; in their books they propose films for each of the sets of readings in the church’s three lectionary cycles. In addition, they provide study questions and other tools to help their readers connect theological issues to individual films. Marsh and Ortiz (1998) combine these approaches. Their collection includes both theoretical pieces and case studies of individual films that pose theological questions. Marsh’s (1998) introductory essay situates the film and theology intersection within the tradition of Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* and Tillich’s method of correlation. After offering correctives to each approach, Marsh suggests the value of film for theology: First, using film in
theology is a key way in which Christian theology can work out what it is going to be possible to say in our contemporary climate about any of theology’s major themes. Taking this too far would mean, of course, allowing contemporary relevance wholly to shape the content of Christian theology today. This is not my intention.

Second, using film in theology reminds us of the importance of the public dimension of any Christian theology. In the same way as Tillich’s theology can be viewed as apologetics, so also a theology of culture unavoidably enters the realm of missiology. Third, films enable Christian theology to be reminded that it is a discipline which seeks to do justice to the emotional and esthetic aspects of human life, as it deals with life’s issues. Precisely because film, as a medium, works through the creation of an *emotional* response first and foremost, as a reaction to the visual image presented, film invites theological reflection to begin through an emotional channel. Fourth, films are vulgar in the sense of being “of/for the people,” i.e. they constitute arguably one of the most influential cultural media at the moment in the West today (television alone being perhaps more influential). Fifth and, finally, theology comes much closer to journalism than it may ever care to admit. Theology, which takes film seriously, reminds itself of its own ephemeral character. We have already noted a word of caution about theology simply desiring to be relevant. But attending to that caution does not mean—as has happened so often in the history of Christian theology—seeking to say a word which is valid for all time. Tillich’s own “system” belies its own ephemeral nature here (pp. 32-33).

Other essays in the book develop these approaches. For example, Graham (1998) takes film as a medium for theology, in which people can experience the religious through the media. In their summary essay, Marsh and Ortiz bring the discussion back to the meaning of incarnation for theology and for contemporary living. A truly incarnational theology takes flight from these considerations of film. It is also a theology quite optimistic about culture and cultural products. Blake, a film critic, takes a similar approach. He restricts his study (2000) to just six film directors (Scorsese, Hitchcock, Capra, Ford, Coppola, and DePalma) for his case studies, but introduces them with a careful theoretical statement of how very specific theological themes come through their films. The introductory chapter on Catholic imaging provides an excellent introduction to this kind of theology-in-film approach.

Both Malits (1998) and Hess (1999) incorporate the habit of using popular culture products into their teaching of religious educators and seminarians. Malits recounts how students learn to do theology in dialogue with their (often, youth) culture. Hess, both here and in other, unpublished work, argues that media “texts” form the raw materials out of which people shape their identities and theological understanding. Her general approach as a theologian consists of opening the media texts (and unlike many, she includes popular music) into a dialogue with students’ experience and with the theological tradition. Writing from India, Carr (1995) also raises the issue of identity and explores the role of the media in shaping people’s identity. For him, the
theological challenge lies in finding a way for the biblical word to inform actions and identities within the media content.

8. Communication: As Constructs In Theology

The final intersection between communication and theology occurs when theologians adopt concepts and ideas from communication study to enrich or resolve issues within theology. The last 10 to 15 years has seen more and more theologians conversant enough with communication to adopt its tools. While some restrict their inquiries to the communicative grounding for religious discourse, others use communication insights to open problematic areas within theology.

A. Language

Communication scholars and linguistic philosophers have long examined how language works, particularly in specialized or restrictive settings like religious discourse. Both Austin (1975) and Searle (1979) single out liturgical and theological language as they develop the theory of speech acts—the theory that language goes beyond description to action. De Jong (2001) follows Searle’s distinction between illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts to analyze theological language and theological practice about talking about God, especially in catechesis and daily talk. Noting, too, that theology has shifted from a pastoral theology focused on God to one focused on the human situation (that is, a theological anthropology), he examines language—both the intersubjectivity and interactive aspects of religious communication. In this project, De Jong attempts to restate theological understandings of meaningful expression in the light of speech act theory, recovering as he does so, the classical theological concept of participation. In his study, he provides a different grounding for theological hermeneutics.

De Jong and his colleagues turn also to the insights from social constructionism to illuminate religious language. Hermans (2002) specifically looks to the anthropological side of religious communication and theology. “Therefore, the focus of this chapter will be on the anthropologic side of religious communication instead of the ‘theistic side.’ … [Communication is challenged not so much by the otherness of God … but by the separateness of other people, each expressing different religious viewpoints. Here social constructionism is useful because it stresses the transformative power of dialogue. … [T]he main topic of this chapter concerns the idea that truth in religious communication is relative to meaning within a certain tradition, place and time and form of life” (pp. 113-114).

Since the social construction model within communication, challenges individualism, Hermans sets up a contrast between two models of God. Borrowing terminology from Bakhtin, he calls them the author hero-God and the polyphonic author-God. In the former, “God gives form to the
life of the hero” (p. 135) and encounters humans in a kind of personal dialogue, a situation Hermans judges more fitting for a premodern context. The latter model allows for many voices and for the larger human community to play a role, along with greater levels of uncertainty in God-talk. For De Jong, Hermans, and their colleagues, the overall project seeks to establish a meaningful way to understand religious communication, a theoretical grounding for theology in the postmodern world.

Rather than examining the social context of religious communication, Parmentier (2001) examines the form of that communication. She takes the inspiration for her theology from studies of narrative. In so doing, she wishes to reclaim narrative, especially biblical narratives, for theology in the light of contemporary research. “During the last 30 years, research on narratives in different areas of human sciences has led theology to reconsider the story, not only as an educational tool, but as a basic structure of the theology itself” (p. 29). She recasts salvation history and soteriology, for example, in terms of the history of the reader of the narrative.

B. Communicative Action

Moving beyond these questions of religious discourse, a group of primarily German theologians has quite systematically explored communication as the conditions for theology itself. Building on the communicative action theory of Jürgen Habermas and largely following the lead of Helmut Peukert (1984) in fundamental theology, they examine the theological implications of communicative action. Some papers and essays appear in works edited by Edmund Arens (1995, 1997). Lamb (1995) follows Peukert to examine the church, (the kingdom of God): Communicative action gives an approach to truth to balance power. He sees connections with nature, history, and culture (and, in this way, opens the theological dialogue to include Benjamin and Adorno). For him, the communicative emphasis on action leads to an emphasis on community. In the same volume, Schreiter (1995) builds a bridge from communicative action to intercultural communication. In his view, this combination calls for a rethinking of theology from an intercultural hermeneutic and praxis, with more attention paid to reception, the need to bring practical theology together with systematic theology, the consideration of identity, and the rethinking of evangelization. The 1997 book more explicitly sets out points of dialogue with the thought of Habermas, with contributors addressing questions of faith, theological aesthetics, eschatology, inspiration, consensus, and church structure.

Pieterse (1998) provides a comprehensive English-language introduction to the theological theory of communicative action, albeit from the perspective of South African theology. Because of the importance of reconciliation in South Africa, a theology that stresses dialogue and domination-free communication acquires a vital interest. He writes, “The concept of communicative actions is built on Habermas’s idea of the ideal speech situation. … From the perspective of Jesus’ communicative actions religious communication in all its facets ought to be
domination free. It should be conducted on an equal footing with the freedom of every participant to bring her/his own perspectives, interpretations, and ideas to the communication on and of, our faith. For this kind of communicative actions, the mode of it, I propose a dialogical theory of communication” (p. 185). In this kind of dialogue, the partners must include not only believers, but also the Scriptures, their history of interpretation, and the contemporary understanding of the tradition.

Hawkins (2000) also uses concepts from the ideal speech situation, while drawing more on Apel’s ethical readings. Because of his interest in Christian millennialism, his essay suggests the “reign of Christ with the martyrs” from Revelation 20: 4-6, can function as the ideal communication community. In so doing, he situates the variants found in the millennial movements in theology. In his view, fundamental theology depends too much on “its two dominant trends of theory formation, to subject-oriented reasoning (“anthropological theology”) and to consensus-oriented theory (“communio-theology”). Communication, however, differs both from subjective consciousness and from collective community” (p. 283). He proposes a more comprehensive model of both communication and social reality that can work as a new ground for theory formation in theology.

Afrasiabi (1998) remains skeptical of the whole project. He feels that theologians have uncritically accepted Habermas’s approach, including his secular orientation. He summarizes his argument in this way: “Contrary to what has become an article of faith in recent theological forays into social theory, I contend: (a) that Habermasian theory has little to contribute to theological thought and is more valuable as an indirect aid in critiquing various deficient theological discourses, and (b) that the current Habermas-sympathetic attempts at a communicative theology are, by and large, open to criticism for the same shortcomings and problems found in Habermas’s own works: and that the need to address these problems necessarily points us toward an alternative post-communication theology” (p. 75). In this very thorough article he attempts to situate each of the theologians in the communicative action movement. But even acknowledging their contributions, they still fall short.

Despite its usefulness as a critique of deficient theologies illustrated above, one of the problem with communicative theology, as formulated by Peukert and others, is that it is limited in its freedom to reconstruct the theoretical framework within which its theology works itself out. It is exposed to the syndrome of a methodological atheism that forms a specific barrier to the stated objective of a transcendental hermeneutics. To elaborate, communicative theology is wedded to Habermas’s pragmatic theory of meaning, in which meaning is assimilated to intersubjectivity. This is, however, precisely what makes communicative theory a theology-nullifying endeavor;
the theological leanings nullified are those that belong to the elements of “God-consciousness.” This corresponds to the dissolution of any sense of foundational ‘transcendental grounding’ (p. 81). Afrasiabi then offers a corrective in the proposal of a “post-communicative” theology, in other words a theology that offers a self-conscious critique of communication and the role of communication in society and in religious discourse.

C. Church

While the communicative action approach touches in some ways on the nature of the church, other communication approaches are possible. Granfield (1994) presents a collection of essays that root the understanding of the church in communication concepts ranging from symbol formation, dialogue, personal witness, and interaction technologies. Granfield himself suggests a cybernetic model. Cornelius (1995) applies a model involving acceptance theory to the local parish.

D. Self-Communication

Although Karl Rahner’s term to describe God’s activity, “self-communication,” has resonance with communication, he did not derive the term from communication study. However, some theologians have turned more explicitly to communication to develop this key idea. The most creative and detailed project appears in Beeck (1991), which seeks to resolve several issues in the theology of revelation. After a critique of the impact that Enlightenment models of knowledge have had on theology, Beeck attempts to recover Patristic insights about the relation of the immanence of God and revelation. To do this, he turns to communication studies and the distinction between the content and relational components of any interpersonal communication. In constructing his argument, he demonstrates first the anthropological infrastructure for revelation: that communication is both process and content; that interpersonal self-communication presumes the other and implies the possibility of transcendence; that interpersonal communication implies both responsibility and freedom; that communication requires the role of tradition; and that interpersonal communication has transcendent preconditions. Then he applies this, by analogy, to divine revelation, which occurs, he says, not from the outside, but in relationship. The appeal to an analysis of communication provides new perspectives on a traditional theological problem.

Molnar (1997) uses the concept of “self-communication” to contrast the theologies of Rahner (Roman Catholic) and Thomas F. Torrance (Reformed). For Rahner, “self-communication” describes the human person as well as God. Rahner sought a closer unity between fundamental theology and dogmatic theology. The concept of mystery does not hinder this because mystery does not describe something senseless and unintelligible but the “horizon of human existence which grounds and encompasses all human knowledge.” … Thus, creatures have a positive
affinity, given by grace, to the Christian mysteries of faith which he [Rahner] conceptualizes as our obediential potency and supernatural existential. The former refers to our openness to being (as spirit in the world) and as such it refers to our openness to God’s self-communication, at least as a possibility. “This potency is … our human nature as such. If the divine self-communication did not occur, our openness toward being would still be meaningful … we are by nature possible recipients of God’s self-communication, listeners for a possible divine word” (p. 306).

Self-communication, then, both establishes and describes revelation and the human participation in the divine mystery, a mystery which includes “the self-communication of God in the depths of existence, called grace, and in history, called Jesus Christ, and this already includes the mystery of the Trinity in the economy of salvation and of the immanent Trinity” (p. 307). Torrance also explores the relationship between theology and science (particularly human knowing). He considers both natural theology and the resurrection and holds that the resurrection, as a unique event, is the point of scientific access to God’s self-communication. In examining the two theological traditions, Molnar finds keys differences, especially in doctrine of immanent trinity, but acknowledges the similarities in the desire to unite fundamental and dogmatic theology. While both theologians use the concept of “self-communication,” they understand it differently; neither draws directly on communication study. The consideration of “self-communication,” especially by Beeck, includes some sense of interpersonal communication. Several other theologians use this construct in developing their thinking. Like Beeck, Gorsuch (1999) incorporates an interpersonal model in her understanding of revelation.

She considers it one of several possibilities. “Three understandings of revelation have been discussed in relation to their meaning and role in pastoral theology: a cooperative view of sensing and laboring with God’s presence in creation, the notion of collision between Christian and personal narratives, and the analogy of interpersonal communication which reclaims mutual relationship and its ongoing development as the content of revelation” (p. 45). Muers (2001) also looks to interpersonal communication as a model for revelation; however, her focus is more on listening and speaking, contact and silence. Finally, Hedahl (2000) puts interpersonal listening at the heart of Lutheran theology, but in this case, listening in multiple contexts, ranging from revelation to homiletics to pastoral counseling.

**Conclusion**

While communication remains a minor part of contemporary theology, it also retains its place as a contact between theology and culture, between theology and the human person. This review of more recent writings on theology and communication reveals some important things. First, some theologians do take communication seriously as a dialogue partner, as something which says something significant about being human. Second, these theologians have an increasingly sophisticated understanding of communication; they have moved beyond the simple sender-
message-receiver model to models that include culture, structures, and audiences. Third, theologians, with an interest in communication, work together more and more to develop their ideas. Fourth, the Christian churches and theologians show a greater understanding of the importance of popular culture in the identity of believers. Fifth, communication scholars also show a growing interest in theology.

On the other hand, this review reveals several weaknesses. First, those theologians showing the greatest interest in communication draw only indirectly on communication studies. For example, the group around Peukert and Arens, which considers communicative action, draws inspiration from Habermas, a philosopher. Their knowledge of communication seems filtered through his approach rather than directed by communication scholars. The same applies to the work of Beeck, whose ideas about interpersonal communication come more from philosophical analysis, and De Jong and his colleagues, who draw on the philosophy of language tradition. Second, a similar weakness applies to communication scholars interested in theology. Third, an interpersonal communication model dominates theological reflection. Few people seem to develop their ideas from mass communication study. Here, much of the writing about communication and theology still regards communication only in an instrumental fashion. Some, while addressing important questions, content themselves with pointing out problems rather than resolving them. Few have undertaken historical studies of theology to see how “the story takes a different form if you structure it around communication” (Edwards, 1994, p. 171).

Comment on popular culture products always runs the risk of succumbing to the ephemeral. However, those with an interest in communication and theology should begin an investigation into those doing theology in forms other than the traditional printed statements or sermons of the churches, other than in theological journals. Christians throughout the centuries have expressed their theology in art, music, and ritual. In today’s culture, we should expect to find theologians working in film, television, and graphic novels. One can only wonder whether those associated with a program like “Joan of Arcadia” regard themselves as theologians. The topics they explore (Does God exist? Does God communicate with us? How do we discern what is of God?) certainly sound like theological ones.

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Communication Theology: Sample Book Titles From Asia

[Most of these volumes are published in association with the Conference of Asian Bishops and are authored or edited by Franz-Josef Eilers. Additional book information is available at: http://www.fabc.org/pub_p2.html.]


This new approach, backed up by known Theologians is at the center of a respective course in the Pastoral Communication Program of the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, Manila where the publication serves as a textbook.


The study originates from the Pastoral Communication Program of the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas (UST), Manila. It should also be applicable to other places and countries in Asia.

The 230-page volume also gives some analyses on the communication dimension of the Asian Synod (1998) and the related document "Ecclesia in Asia." The new edition also contains articles on Communication Theology, Communication Spirituality and reports on two special OSC initiatives on the academic level: the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication based at St. John's University (Bangkok), and the Program on Pastoral/ Social Communication at the Graduate School and Theological Faculty of the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas (Manila).

Belief In Media: Cultural Perspectives On Media And Christianity


[Most of these essays were written by members of the International Study Commission on Media, Religion, and Culture.]

Contents

List of Figures

Contributors

Media, Culture and Religion: An Introduction, Peter Horsfield

Part I: The Cultural Perspective

Introduction

Reconceptualizing Religion and Media in a Post-National, Postmodern World: A Critical Historical Introduction, Lynn Schofield Clark

Theology, Church and Media – Contours in a Changing Cultural Terrain, Peter Horsfield

Because God is Near, God is Real: Symbolic Realism in U.S. Latino Popular Catholicism and Medieval Christianity, Roberto S. Goizueta

Notes on Belief and Social Circulation (Science Fiction Narratives), Juan Carlos Henriquez

Part II: Mediated Christianity

Introduction

Pentecostal Media Images and Religious Globalization in Sub-Saharan Africa, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu
Identities, Religion and Melodrama: A View from the Cultural Dimension of the Latin American Telenovela, German Rey

Visual Media and Ethiopian Protestantism, David Morgan

From Morality Tales in Horror Movies: Towards an Understanding of the Popularity of West African Video Film, Jolyon Mitchell

Religion and Meaning in the Digital Age: Field Research on Internet/Web Religion, Stewart M. Hoover and Jin Kyu Park

Part III: Media Culture And Christian Institutions

Introduction

Making Religious Media: Notes from the Field, Adán M. Medrano

Rescripting Religious Education in Media Culture, Mary E. Hess

Changes in the Thai Catholic Way of Life, Siriwan Santisakultarm

The U.S. Catholic Church Sexual Abuse Scandal: A Media/Religion Case Study, Frances Forde Plude

Part IV: An Overview

Major Issues in the Study of Media, Religion and Culture, Robert A. White

Bibliography

Index
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Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction: When New Media Meets Faith

1. Theology of Technology 101: Understanding the Relationship Between Theology and Technology

2. New Media Theory 101: Understanding New Media and the Network Society


4. Managing the Network with Theology: Who is My Neighbor in Digital Culture?

5. Developing a Faith-Based Community Response to New Media

6. Engaging Appropriately with Technology and Media

Bibliography

Notes

Index
Table of Contents

Frances Forde Plude, Introduction: Communication Theology in Theory and Practice

Terrence Tilley, Angela Zukowski, Narrative in a Post Literate Culture

Paul Soukup, The Bible and Mass Media

Robert White, A Religion of Communication

Bernard “Bob” Bonnot, Trinity, Creation, Revelation, and Incarnation

Thomas Boomershine, The Democratization of Electronic Media

Paul Soukup, Implications for Seminary Formation

Avery Dulles, The Travails of Dialogue

Ladislas Örsy, A Tool for Unity vs Danger for Identity

Hermann Pottmeyer, Toward Communio

Frances Forde Plude, Interactive Communication in the Church

Bernard “Bob” Bonnot, An Adventure in Television

Bishop Pierre Dumaine, A Global and Local Perspective

John L. Allen, Three Stellar Careers in Religion and Television

William Keeler, The Gospel and the Media

Francis Maier, A Denver Experience

Barbara Nicolosi, Lessons from Hollywood
Rose Pacatte, Interview

Parish Works Samples, The View from the Pew

Peter Malone, Models of Communication

Other Voices, Excerpts

Resources
Communication And Lonergan: Common Ground For Forging A New Age


Table of Contents

Foreword: Common Ground, Robert M. Doran

Preface: Transforming the Wasteland, Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup

I. Introductory Studies

1. Insight and Understanding: The “Common Sense” Rhetoric of Bernard Lonergan, John Angus Campbell

2. Writing, the Writer, and Lonergan: Authenticity and Intersubjectivity, Thomas J. Farrell

3. Preaching as a Form of Theological Communication: An Instance of Lonergan’s Evaluative Hermeneutics, Carla Mae Streeter

4. The Spectrum of “Communication” in Lonergan, Frederick E. Crowe

II. Specialized Studies

5. Neither Jew nor Greek, but One Human Nature and Operation in All, Frederick E. Crowe


7. Philosophy After Philosophy, Hugo A. Meynell

8. From Logic to Rhetoric in Science: A Formal=Pragmatic Reading of Lonergan’s Insight, William Rehg

9. The Fragility of Consciousness: Lonergan and the Postmodern Concern for the Other, Frederick G. Lawrence

10. On Truth, Method, and Gadamer, Hugo A. Meynell

11. The Interiority of Communication: Literary History, Geoffrey B. Williams
12. The Human Good and Christian Conversation, *Frederick G. Lawrence*

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14. The Role of Theological Symbols in Mediating Cultural Change, *J. J. Mueller*

**Reference Materials**

Glossary of Lonerganian Terminology, *Carla Mae Streeter*

References (with annotations by *John Angus Campbell*)

Index
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Contents

Introduction

The Theology of the Church and Communication, Patrick Granfield

Communication: Meaning and Modalities, Robert A. White, S.J.

Truth and Power in Ecclesial Communication, Peter Henrici, S.J.

Symbolic Forms of Communication, Gregor Goethals

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Contributors

Abbreviations

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Mary E. Hess

Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction

1. Rich Treasures in Jars of Clay: Theological Education in Changing Times

2. Searching for the Blue Fairy: Questioning Technology and Pedagogy in Theological Education

3. Understanding by Design: Creating Learning Experiences That Meet the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century

4. “You’ve Got Mail”: Teaching and Learning in Online Formats

5. All That We Can’t Leave Behind: Learning from the Past in Engaging New Media

6. Embodied Pedagogies: Engaging Racism in Theological Education and Digital Cultures

7. Freeing Culture: Copyright and Teaching in Digital Media

8. Seeing, Hearing, creating: Exercises That Are “Low Tech” but That Engage Media Cultures

Bibliography

Index
Practices Of Dialogue In The Roman Catholic Church: Aims And Obstacles, Lessons And Laments

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Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction

1. The Matrix of Dialogue in the Church: The Life of the Parish and the Pastoral Council

2. Discerning the Mission of the Local Church: The Bishop and the Diocesan Synod

3. An Overwhelming Response to a U.S. Bishops’ Invitation: The Call to Action

4. A New Way of Teaching with Authority: The Pastoral Letters of the U.S. Bishops’ Conference

5. Placating Polarizations or Making Them Productive? The Catholic Common Ground Initiative

6. The Church Women Want: What Women Religious Learned in Chapters

7. Collegiality and Constraint: The Synod of Bishops

8. Differentiated Consensus, Imperfect Communion: Ecumenical Dialogues

9. Rethinking the Oldest Divisions in the Interests of Larger Truths and Lasting Peace: Interreligious Dialogue

10. Lessons and Laments and the Unfinished Agenda of a Dialogical Church

Notes

Index
Religion, Media, And Culture: A Reader, Gordon Lynch And Jolyon Mitchell, Eds., Routledge, 2012

Introduction: Sophia Marriage and Jolyon Mitchell

Section 1: Identity, Media, and Religion
2. Lynn Schofield Clark: Funky Religion
3. Jim McDonnell: Desperately seeking credibility: English Catholics, the Media, and the Church

Section 2: Conflict, Media, and Religion
4. Rosalind Hackett: Managing or Manipulating Conflict in the Nigerian Media
5. Rubina Ramji: Representation of Islam in North American Mass Media: Becoming the 'Other'

Section 3: Popular Piety, Music and Religion
7. John Ferre: The Media of Popular Piety
10. Myrna Grant: Christ and the Media: Considerations on the Negotiation of Meaning in Religious Television

Section 4: Media Literacy and Religion
11. Mary Hess: Media Literacy and Religion
12. Danial Stout and David Scott: Mormons and Media Literacy: Exploring the Dynamics of Religious Media Education
13. Franz Josef Eilers: The Communication Formation of Church Leaders as a Holistic Concern

Section 5: Film and Religion
14. Steve Nolan: Towards a New Religious Film Criticism: Using Film to understand Religious identity rather than locate cinematic analogue
15. Gaye Ortiz: The Catholic Church and its attitude to film as an arbiter of cultural meaning
16. Jorg Herrmann: From Popular to Arthouse: And analysis of love and nature as religious motifs in recent cinema
17. Christopher Deacy: Paradise Lost or Paradise Learned? Sin & Salvation in Pleasantville
Section 6: New Media and Religion
18. Heidi Campbell: Approaches to Religion Research in Computer—mediated Communication
19. Alf Linderman and Mia Lovheim: Internet, Religion, and the Attribution of Social Trust
20. Cees Hamelink: The Decent Society and Cyberspace
21. Gregor Goethals: Myth and Ritual in Cyberspace
22. Peter Horsfield: Electronic Media and the Past-Future of Christianity

Section 7: Media Ethics and Religion
23. Robert White: The Emerging 'Communitarian' Ethics of Public Communication
24. Clifford Christians: Cross-Cultural Ethics and Truth
25. Hamid Mowlana: Foundation of Communication in Islamic Societies
26. Mark Fackler: Communitarian Media Theory with an African Flexion
27. Richard Holloway: A Brief Look at the Ethics of Broadcasting
28. Jolyon Mitchell: Emerging Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture

Annotated Bibliographies

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Media Ethics

Steve Nolan
Film and Religion

Heidi Campbell
New Media and Religion
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Contents

Preface

Part I: The Context of the Mass Media and Moral Reflection

Introduction

Section 1: Mass Media as a Site for Moral Reflection

1. The Expressive Face of Culture: Mass Media and the Shape of the Human Moral Environment (1), Gregor Goethals

2. The Expressive Face of Culture: Mass Media and the Shape of the Human Moral Environment (2), Michael Real


5. The Life of the Spirit in a Mass-mediated Culture, Günter Virt

Section 2: The Development of Moral Reasoning as Situated in the Mass Media


7. Matching the Inner World with Outer Reality: Moral Development Domains and the Role of the Media, Michael J. Garanzini, S.J.

Part II: Moral Dimensions of Public Life

Introduction

8. Television Images of Work and the Moral Imagination: Theological Interpretations, Lois K. Daly


11. Gender in the Media: Notes on Profit and Ownership Contraction, *Christine E. Gudorf*

12. Teaching Values: The Shifting Roles of Women and the Media, *James A. Capo*


14. Towards a Solution to the Conflict Created by Mass Media, *Ivan Fůcek, S.J.*

15. The Church as Moral Communicator, *Paul A. Soukup, S.J.*

*Part III: Using the Media for Moral Development*

Introduction


18. Mass Media and the Enlargement of Moral Sensibility, *Myrna Reid Grant*


*Part IV: Philosophical and Theological Reflections: The Importance of Moral Imagining*

Introduction


22. Moral Theology as Communication, *Enda McDonagh*

Index

About the Authors
Media, Culture And Catholicism

Paul Soukup, Editor, (Sheed and Ward publication)

Contents

Introduction
Paul A. Soukup

PART 1: Orientations: Theology, Communication, Church

1. Communications Media and the State of Theology, Walter J. Ong
2. The Catholic Imagination and the Catholic University, Andrew M. Greeley
3. Media and Church: The Presentation of Religious Information Via Media, Phyllis Zagano

PART 2: Contexts: History, Philosophy, Theory

1. Visible Image and Invisible Faith, Gregor Goethals
2. Communicative Form and Theological Style, Paul A. Soukup
3. Ministry in an Age of Communications, Robert F. Leavitt
4. Models of Church and Communication, 82 William Thorn

PART 3: Practices: Worship, Homiletics, Teaching

1. Religious Symbolism and Mass Communication, Peter Mann
2. Communication and the Art of Presiding, Dennis C. Smolarski
3. Preaching the Gospel in a Video Culture, Robert P. Wavtak
4. The Use of Media in the Teaching of Church History, Robert J Wister
5. Possibilities of Audiovisual Narrative for Moral Formation, Henk Hoekstra and Marjeet Verbeek
6. Formation of Church Leaders for Ministering in the Technological Age, Angela Ann Zakowski
7. Forums for Dialogue: Teleconferencing and the American Catholic Church, Frances Forde Plude

References
Index
About the Authors
Communication And Theology: A Review Of The Literature

Paul Soukup, S.J.

[This volume is one of the first to study the interaction between Communication and Theology. It was published in 1983 by the World Association for Christian Communicators (WACC).]

Contents

Preface

Part I: Review of the Literature

The area of enquiry

Organizing the material

Religious language and self-understanding

The linguistic analogue

The linguistic analogue and religious self-understanding

The linguistic analogue and Christian attitudes toward the media

The linguistic analogue and Christian strategies for communication

The linguistic analogue and ethical or advocacy questions

The aesthetic analogue

The aesthetic analogue and religious self-understanding

The cultural analogue

The cultural analogue and religious self-understanding

The cultural analogue and Christian attitudes toward the media

The cultural analogue and Christian strategies for communication
The cultural analogue and ethical or advocacy questions

The dialogic analogue

The dialogic analogue and religious self-understanding

The dialogic analogue and Christian strategies for communication

The dialogic analogue and ethical or advocacy questions

The broadcast/mechanical analogue

The broadcast/mechanical analogue and religious self-understanding

The broadcast/mechanical analogue and Christian attitudes toward the media

The broadcast/mechanical analogue and Christian strategies for communication

The broadcast/mechanical analogue and ethical or advocacy questions

The theological analogue

The theological analogue and religious self-understanding

The theological analogue and Christian attitudes toward the media

The theological analogue and Christian strategies for communication

The theological analogue and ethical or advocacy questions

*Reflections and conclusions*

Communication analogues and basic questions

Regional correlations

Ecclesiastical correlations

Criticism of the debate
Some Questions

Part II: A theological study program for communication

A guiding method

Goals

Methods

Theological questions

Communication questions

Works referred to in the text

Bibliography
Communication Theology: A Sample Syllabus

Course Goals

This course is exploring a relatively new arena of thought: the conceptual links, or bridges, between the fields of theology and communication. While such concepts will be somewhat theoretical, our goal is to build the ideas from solid readings and from practical human experience. Near the end of the course, we will identify components of a Communication Theology.

Major Course Themes

- God’s self-communication in Scripture and history
- Models of Church and appropriate communication styles
- Reception and dialogue in the Church
- The Church as communio – a communion
- God language and woman’s experience
- Evangelization: Is the “Electronic Church” or the Internet the answer?
- How do we communicate spiritually?
- Churches and Public Relations

Course Requirements

1. There will be about 45 pages of reading for each class discussion. Multiple copies of articles will be on reserve in the library for student use.

2. Each student will read a book in connection with a research project and do a book summary. An Executive Summary will be done for classmates.

3. There will be a research paper (12-15pp) and a brief oral discussion on your topic. An Executive Summary of your findings will be distributed. The Instructor will provide a list of topics and you may select one.

4. Students will do one additional short outside reading assignment and summarize its content (1-2pp) for classmates.

5. Instructor files and some books will be available for research projects.
Course Calendar

[Readings are specified below for each class.]

Class #1: Overview of course/requirements by instructor; introductory lecture

Film that demonstrates most of the themes of the course in storytelling format: A Man for all Seasons, Oscar-winning film about Thomas More

Class #2: God’s self-communication in history - revealed in Scripture

From Retrieving Fundamental Theology: The Three Styles of Contemporary Theology, by Gerald O’Collins, S.J.:

- Chp. 1, pp 7-15, “Catholic Theology Since 1965”
- Chp. 3, pp 40-47,”Fundamental Theology”
- Chp. 4, pp 48-62, “Die Verbum”

From Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Ed. Austin Flannery, O.P.:

- pp 750-765, ”Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation”

Class #3: Experience and Symbols in God’s dialogue with humanity, Gerald O’Collins, S.J.

- Chp. 8, pp 98-107 “God’s Symbolic Self-Communication”
- Chp. 9, pp 108-119 “Experience and Symbols”
- Chp. 10, pp 120-128 “The Revelation of Love”

From Granfield:

- Chp. 1, pp 1-18,”The Theology of the Church and Communication” by Patrick Granfield

Class #4: Models of Church and Appropriate Communication Styles

From Models of the Church, Avery Dulles, S.J.:

- Chp. 1, pp 15-33, ”The Use of Models in Ecclesiology”
From Catholic Mind, Vol 69 (Oct 1971):

- pp 6-16, "The Church IS Communication" (Dulles)

From The Reshaping of Catholicism, Avery Dulles, S.J.:

- Chp. 7, pp 110-131, "The Church and Communications: Vatican II and Beyond"

Class #5: Dialogue & Reception: Communication Concepts

From Granfield:

- Chp. 6, pp 96-102, "Dialogue as a Model for Communication in the Church" (Hermann Pottmeyer)

From The Reception of Vatican II, ed. Alberigo, Jossua, Komonchak:

- Chp. 2, pp 27-43, “A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II: Twenty Years of Interpretation of the Council”

Unpublished Pottmeyer manuscript, “Reception and Submission – Contemporary Aspects of the Rediscovered Reality of ‘Reception’”
Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community And Liturgy In A Technological Culture, Richard R. Gaillardetz, Crossroad, 2000

By Frances Forde Plude

[This review of Professor Gaillardetz’s book appeared in the National Catholic Reporter.]

There has been a recent shift in research studying the impact of media violence on viewers, especially youth. Instead of trying to prove this viewing causes violent behavior, researchers now argue that media violence desensitizes us – making us less conscious of how much violence permeates our culture.

This concept parallels the argument of Richard Gaillardetz in this thoughtful volume about how our technological tools often replace, or glide us past, the moments of active engagement in our lives. Conscious meal preparation and sharing, for example, is often ‘zapped’ by our instant microwave action. This book will help readers reflect more thoughtfully upon this reality. And yet the book is enormously practical also. If you are harried by the technological tools that were supposed to give us all more leisure, I recommend this volume as helpful tonic.

Gaillardetz admits that cell phones and video games have invaded his family and he does not suggest eliminating them. However, building upon Albert Borgmann’s philosophy of technology, the author argues: a) It is not the technology that is problematic. Instead we, as consumers must see beyond the commodity (a tool, or even religion as a commodity, dispensing grace), to preserve zones of conscious awareness in our daily lives. And 2) from the Church’s own heritage, we can find rich resources like relational Trinitarian theology or truly communal liturgies. This allows the ‘dailiness’ of our lives to be transformed by God’s grace. The author wisely urges lifestyle discernment rather than a condemnation of specific technological tools.

Gaillardetz is a respected theologian who has written authoritatively (and clearly) about the Magisterium (Teaching With Authority, Liturgical Press, 1997). And he represents a growing number of competent lay theologians speaking from personal experience as a spouse or parent.

Evoking Karl Rahner’s theology of a graced universe, Gaillardetz reminds us throughout the book that within mundane moments (like changing diapers) we are touched by a loving God. He worries that the almost invisible ease of technology desensitizes us to these redemptive moments, or “focal points” as Borgmann calls them.

Another helpful reflection by the author is that “one of the characteristics of modern society is the effective anesthetization of humanity” by technical tools that make our life “unproblematic.”
He urges constraints and deprivations (a new asceticism) that demand the use of memory and imagination. He reminds us that, in the Christian life, “we must embrace emptiness.”

It is clear from both text and footnotes that, along with Borgmann, the author has studied the major analysts of the topic – from Rahner and Catherine Mowry LaCugna to the MIT scholar Sherry Turkle. (Her research over the past decade has helped us understand “the second self” that emerges as we interact with computers). One helpful thinker not mentioned is John Staudenmaier, author of Technology’s Storytellers: Re-Weaving the Human Fabric. Incidentally, because this work is full of rich ideas an index would be helpful. It is sometimes hard to find specific topics when you want to return to them.

Gaillardetz does offer a practical but profound analysis of the intersection of religious thought and practice in an electronic culture. This book, along with some of his other work, enriches an emerging body of thought identified by some as “Communication Theology.” For example, he is beginning to articulate a model of theological reception that integrates today’s more interactive (two-way) communicative culture. Gaillardetz, and others like him, will contribute to the re-thinking required by theologians in an electronic age. This task is challenging and of great importance.

Building upon this helpful volume, Gaillardetz and others can probe some issues not explored fully in the book. For example, we can consciously think of computers not as computation but as community. Then technologies themselves can be redemptive. We can also utilize contemplative prayer practices – along with liturgy – to help us balance our hi-tech overload.

Another topic related to ideas in the book is recent work in communication studies showing how we do mediate or transform technological tools and media messages as we interact with them. In other words, we are not just manipulated by these items; we respond and transform them.

As I studied the Gaillardetz work, an incident occurred that helped me reflect upon the book’s argument. I was on my way to a Yo-Yo Ma cello concert and, as I parked my car, I noticed a van ahead of me with a handicapped license plate. I watched as a platform extend from the van and a man in a motorized wheelchair drove off the lowered platform on to the sidewalk. With a remote-control unit, he directed the mechanism back into the van and move off to the concert.

As I returned to my car after the concert, this gentleman in his wheelchair came up behind me. I said to him: “I noticed you are very self-sufficient, but is there anything I can do to help?” He replied, humorously: “Would you go out dancing with me?” As we chuckled, he added: “Korea did this to me. But at least I’m mobile.”
This unique and graced interaction – like a focal point – reminded me, as this book does, that we *do* need to preserve moments of caring, connecting humanity – even with our useful tools. And we need the gifts of skilled analysts like Gaillardetz who can help us *be* church-in-communion consciously. He helps us become more aware of “the vital web of interactions and relationships that constitute one’s daily way of life.”
Preface To The Volume The Bible And The Technology Of The Word, Jose Palakeel, Ed. In India

By Frances Forde Plude

It is one sign of our times that traditional forms of literacy such as reading and writing are declining while new forms of literacy, (called by Ong) “secondary orality”, are emerging. This new literacy results, in part, from that permanent fixture in…homes, the television (set), and, in part, from the increasing portability and ubiquity of computers, popular music, and electronic games. – From One Medium to Another, Soukup and Hodgson, editors, Sheed and Ward, p. 3.

Reviewing the themes and concepts in this Palakeel volume, I was reminded of an earlier symposium of the American Bible Society on “Communicating the Bible Through Multimedia.” I have quoted from this volume above. That volume and this one, help us to conceptualize biblical storytelling in a digital, interactive culture – where media audiences are more and more in control of the ‘text.’ And where there is a cacophony of media ‘noise’ competing for our attention. What happens when an electronic ‘feedback loop’ allows personalization and individualized learning in biblical storytelling? Isn’t it possible that the Bible can be even more compelling if we can enter a biblical ‘virtual reality?’

Computer technology enhances non-linear storytelling of the Bible – with memory traces and content links – so we can more easily track biblical themes and favorite passages. The random-access capacity of the computer (with nodes and links) allows us to move through the Bible in our own personal way. When enhanced by visuals, this brings the Bible to life in the ‘language’ of our century. For young people, especially, raised in a multimedia environment, the Bible can be ‘born again.’

This is the challenge and the excitement of this volume of essays! These ideas are especially important for pastoral-ministry training – in seminaries and in diocesan lay ministry programs. These training programs, unfortunately, have rarely taken time to reflect upon the impact of our digital culture on our religious institutions and in the sharing of God’s Word to humanity globally.

Imagine how delighted I was when I traveled to India, to discover that here was a systematic and enjoyable curriculum introducing communication concepts into seminary training.

This program – developed by Jose Palakeel, the editor of this volume – will be expanded further when the IMPACT Centre will be built in Kochi, the financial and ecclesiastical capital of Kerala, India. IMPACT represents Initiatives for Missionary Pastoral Animation and
Communication Theology. The Centre will answer the need for a new vision and strategy in the communication culture of churches, helping them adapt to the digital culture of this century.

It is a blessing that we have new communication tools and theories. This volume, and the IMPACT Centre, will spread the ‘good news’ of this new communication environment and its impact on our faith. This is, surely, what Jesus would do!
Communication Theology: Resource Sheet

By Frances Forde Plude

[History, analytical frameworks, and resources (partial bibliography below).]

History to Date

- Seminars on Communication & Theology, Gregorian, Rome
- Sheed & Ward books: Communication, Culture & Theology series
- CTSA annual seminars for almost a decade
- Media, Religion and Culture seminars in U.S., Scotland, Sweden, others
- Communication Theology courses taught at several institutions
- Formation programs, Rome, Manila, Dayton (for ministerial leaders)
- 30 theology doctoral students, globally, exploring communication
- Support of the International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture (with linkages on several continents)

Genres of Communication Studies

- Structural/Functional theories: language, social systems
- Cognitive/Behavioral theories: psychology, the individual
- Interpretive theories: phenomenology, hermeneutics
- Critical theories: society, social practice (Marxism, feminism)
- Interactional theories: social life as a process of interactions

Five Possible Interfaces Between Theology & Communication

- Theology and Communication
  (borrowing communication uses, constructs: linguistics, culture, texts)
- Communicative Theology
(communication-centered, communication-oriented theology)

- **Systematic** Theology of Communication
  (communication as a specific discipline within systematic theology)

- **Pastoral** Theology of Communication
  (cultural studies, ministries, catechesis, preaching, formation)

- Christian *Moral Vision* of Communication
  (practice and policymaking; participatory communication)

### Selected Resources

Sample CTSA Communication Theology Seminars:

- Communication Theology *Dialogue*: Soukup, Plude, Philibert
- *Trinity* as Self-Communication: John R. Sachs, S.J.
- *Narrative* Within Communication Theology: Terrence W. Tilley
- *Preaching* as Communication Theology: Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P.
- *Nothing Sacred* as Communication Theology: Bill Cain, Kevin Bradt
- *Reception* Within Communication Theology: Richard Gaillardetz
- *Cultural Contest* for Communication Theology: Kathryn Tanner

Sheed & Ward *Communication, Culture & Theology* books (Sheed & Ward is now Rowman & Littlefield):

- *Fidelity & Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media*
- *From One Medium to Another: The Bible and Multimedia*
- *New Image of Religious Film*
- *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ Figures in Film*
- *Media, Culture and Catholicism*
- *Communication and Lonergan*
- *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination*
- *The Church and Communication*

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*Aetatis Novae: Pastoral Instruction on Social Communication* (1992)