

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION COMMUNICATING FOR COMMUNITY

God-in-Community

“In the beginning was the Word”. In the beginning was God-in-Community, God-in-communion and God-in-constant-communication. God’s very nature is relationship.

In the Holy Trinity, the three “persons” are equal and one, sharing the same nature. The love of Mother/Father for the Son is such that that very love constitutes the third person, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is love, communication and communion personified; the three Persons are different, but equal and one in love and communion.

In the image of the Tri-une God

When we are told that the human being is made in God’s image and likeness, it is the image of the tri-une God, and thus we too need to communicate. We are fully human through our capacity to communicate and our acts of communication. Communication presupposes relationship, and community is constituted through communication.

As communication is so essential for the individual and for communities and societies, it must be considered a basic human right. A right as fundamental as that for food, clothing and shelter. If these basic human needs are not met, human dignity is violated.

Silencing people is a crime against humanity. The poor and oppressed are not voiceless. They do speak loudly, and in many voices but are not heard. The problem is that these voices are suppressed and silenced, often by mass media.

Salvation: Re-establishing communication with God and between ourselves

In becoming flesh the **word** re-established communication, community and communion with humankind. The Old Testament is a story of God’s communication with humanity.

There are two powerful images in the Old Testament that reflect a breakdown in dialogue. After the exodus from the Garden of Eden, communication between God and human beings was damaged; while the story of the Tower of Babel shows what chaos and confusion follow from humanity’s wish to be independent of God. It can be a metaphor for modern life.

The Word became human, died of love for all and became Emmanuel: God with us. All are called to the Kingdom.

The Good News of the Kingdom

Jesus announced the Good News of the Kingdom, and commissioned his disciples to proclaim it to all people, until the end of time. To enable Christians to carry out this task, they have been promised the power of the Holy Spirit to change the Babel of confusion into the Pentecost of genuine understanding.

Sometimes it is necessary to make the distinction between Church communication and Christian communication. Church communication is limited and gives an account of church affairs. **Christian communication** is concerned with the values of the

Kingdom: Important for Christians, but not their exclusive prerogative. Muslims, Marxists, Hindus and other men and women of good will can be concerned about Kingdom, or Godly values, proclaim them and work for them.

For the proclamation of these virtues a specific form, a genre of communication was used by Jesus: The parable. Unlike the laws of the Pharisees and Saducees which told people what to do and what not to do, Jesus told realistic open-ended story, which delivered a challenge, which caused people to make judgements on their own behaviour. There are communication scholars who see the parables of Jesus as perfect examples of manipulative communication.

Parables communicate Kingdom values.

A communicating Church

The Church as a community of believers is not only a means for promoting the Kingdom. It is meant to embody and testify to the central values of the Kingdom. Among these are oneness, reconciliation, equality, justice, freedom, harmony, peace and love.

It is the responsibility of all believers to bear witness to Christ and to the Kingdom. This is not a task assigned to a few specialists. All need to rediscover the early Christian community's understanding of a witnessing and communicating Church. We need to witness by action and words in family life, in communities, worship and in public.

The communication of Christians is meant to glorify God. We are challenged to witness God's transforming power in all areas of human life. Paul calls himself and all servants of the Word "servants of your glory" (Eph 1:2) and thus "servants of your joy" (II Cor 1:24). The glory of God should be a hallmark of all Christian communication.

Characteristics of Christian Communication

Four principles characterise Christian communication, or communication based on Kingdom values:

1. **Communication is participatory:**
Mass media, in general, are one-way. Information flows from top to bottom, from the centre to the periphery, from the few to the many. Alternative, democratic media should make a serious attempt to reverse this process. The essence of group communication is equal participation.
2. **Communication creates community:**
Communication in groups brings people together. One of the aims is to create a group spirit and the extension of this spirit to a larger community. Group communication can rekindle community spirit.
3. **Communication liberates:**
Most mass media are part of established power structures. In contrast, group communication enables ordinary people to articulate their own needs and helps them to act together to meet those needs. Group

communication aims to bring about structures in society which are more just, more egalitarian and more conducive to the fulfilment of human rights and in this sense, group media can be at the service of liberation.

4. **Communication should be prophetic:**

It is important that groups of Christians try to discover and interpret the signs of the times. In order to do this, they need to listen to the Word of God and be led by the Holy Spirit. This is a condition of prophecy. Prophetic communication expresses itself in both words and deeds, and leads to action for transformation. Prophetic communication also challenges the lies, half-truths and concealments that are part of mass communication in Africa today. Telling lies in Africa is not immoral, it also violates one of the deepest values of African culture: Telling the truth.