

DENIS MCQUAIL, SVEN WINDAHL AND F.X. DANCE'S THEORIES AND COMMUNICATION THEOLOGY

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Abstract

Doubts arise when one thinks or envisages the communicational dimension of theology. In what way is communication inherent in theology? It would no doubt be a long thesis and a long discourse if our aim was to be fully exhaustive in our approach. But, in this article, we will look at some pointers which characterize the process of communication and yet are deeply inherent in theology. Communication traditionally is defined as the social interaction of messages. This interaction brings about commonality and identification with a particular group of people. For example, a group of teenagers will appreciate a type of music that suits their wishes and their age.

Keywords: *Denis Mcquail, Communication Theology, Church.*

Social interaction has also been experienced in the biblical tradition and biblical history. There has been a transmission of messages, from God to humans – this transmission of messages has brought about a response from the humans. This interaction resulted in faith or faith denial. This interaction through messages, of course, in some instances addresses social problems but, at times, it addresses other issues.

The same could be said with regard to the 1982 book entitled “Communication models,” authored by Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl, which basically highlighted three models of ‘mass communication’ beginning from Harold Lasswell’s formula in 1948 to the models of Convergence and Transnational Communication in 1993. Lasswell’s model was a model that described communication as a linear transmission of messages through the well-known formula: “Who, says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?”

Already in other writings we have clearly shown how God is the sender and the individual

becomes the receiver of messages. Then the message is the Word – Jesus. He is not only the message, but he is also the medium. The messages are sent to individuals in order to solicit a response of faith. All this shows that there is a communicational dimension in theology.

Nevertheless, this model is a linear-based telephonic system approach to communication and it is not adequate to describe the eminently rich and oral communication of a tribal village in which the head communicates the hereditary culture through stories, dances and rituals that elicit the active participation of the audience – a reality James Carey took seriously in his definition of communication (COLOMBO, 2002).

That is why, for Carey, it was important to have a ritual view of communication and not only a technical view of communication. The ritual view of communication is associated with terms like sharing, participation, association and fellowship. We can also associate it with terms like commonness, communion, community and communal faith. All these words fall under the concept of communication. The aim of the ritual view of communication is not the transmission of messages from one point to the other, but it is to help in maintaining ideals (CAREY, 1989).

This is what we basically see in theology, that God communicates to individuals and that this is done in a context of a relationship between God and the individual. It is a relationship in which human beings collectively share, participate, associate and in fellowship come together in communal prayer to express, through a liturgical celebration, their longings and aspirations. The faith they profess is not just some private faith, but it is the faith of a praying Church community – who learn and are taught

the creed and the faith. They inherit the faith tradition from the community and later pass it on to their children and children's children.

We can also add here the fact that communication constitutes the human being and represents the specific and ontological dimension of the individual. The human being is born out of communion between man and woman, and grows up in a context of love. The cognitive abilities open the mind to curiosity, discovery and doubt, which pave the way for the articulation of language, thoughts, interpretation and dialogue. Thus, to communicate is to share with others one's interpretation of things and be enriched in the process of interaction through presence and participation.

In this sense, we can say that communication is what existentially and essentially defines the human person not only as *sapiens*, but also as *communicans*. This is what the Christian community does together. It is a community that believes, but also doubts at times. In doubt and in faith, the Christian community articulates their thoughts and aspirations in a language that is limited and that's the limitedness of articulating and conceptualizing God.

Additionally, communication is a symbolic exchange in which subjects engage in an active and creative way. There is no asymmetry between the sender and the receiver, but there is reciprocity in which they are both active agents in the process of communication, in which, communication is not only the production and transmission of the message, but also the construction of meaning and the conserving of memory across the generations. Therefore, the human being participates in the revitalization of cultures.

Probably, that is why, already in the year 1970, Frank E. X. Dance published an article "The 'concept' of communication," in *The Journal of Communication*, in which he provided the different definitions of the term 'communication,' which different authors had given. Dance examined the multitudinous definitions of 'communication' and came up with fifteen concepts, which according to him represent the 15 main themes of communication (DANCE, 1970).

The main purpose of this essay is to examine the multitudinous definitions of communication in the light of the meaning of "concept" as

reflected in the literature of the philosophy of science. One possible result of such an examination is the derivation of the essential components of the concept of communication as reflected in the definitions. A second, though admittedly less plausible, result would be the synthesis of the components into a single definition of the concept of communication. A concept is the result of a generalizing mental operation. The initial apprehension and perception of individual acts, or realities, lead to the grouping of precepts and the labelling of such grouping. The grouping is the concept and the name, or "term," serves as the label for a specific concept. A concept is a generic mental image abstracted from percepts and generally relies on an originally inductive process rooted in objective reality (LEWISKI, 2002).

For Dance, some concepts like, dog, food, colour, clouds, thunder, wealth, among others, are manifestly common and ordinary concepts which come from the obtrusive experiences of the daily life of the people. We can here add some concepts like bread and wine on the altar, the bible, and several other concepts that are ordinary in theological terms. However, there are some concepts which are extraordinary and these concepts need cognitive structuring of the experiences. We can also here think about the transcendence of God, the Holy Trinity and several other terms which are really difficult to conceptualize and encapsulate.

Dance discovered that communication refers to symbols, to the verbal and to speeches. In this view, communication concerns also the interchanging of ideas. That is why communication creates understanding and, in this perspective, communication creates understanding between people.

Other important elements of communication are interaction, relationship and social process. To support this assertion, Dance indicated that communication can take place at different levels including on the biological level. Communication reduces uncertainty and helps in the defending of the ego. It is in this context that Dance believed that the reduction of uncertainty is an important concept of communication. Communication is also a process and this is the case because it involves the transmitting of ideals and it also

refers to what is transferred, sometimes to the means, by which it is transferred, sometimes to the whole process.

We can talk of communication in terms of linking and binding. Communication creates commonality. Communication is the channel, carrier, means, and route. It is the route that links two things together – it could even link different things, not necessarily two but they could even be more.

Furthermore, Dance cited stimuli as one of the concepts of communication and believed that communication refers to transmission from one source to the other. Communication is intentional.

We could indeed go into a long essay and theological discourse to see how all these terms relate to different theological themes and that would all together be another article but for the time being, suffice to say that the communicational perspective is indeed inherent in different themes of theology where we see the intention of God to communicate with the human being through different mediations and how God in history has interacted with the human being through different ways.

All the fifteen concepts indeed do have theological connotation and link. This is the relationship between theology and communication in the wider perspective – namely that communication is inherent in theology. Once again this could be done from different angles, but we have here done it by looking at the communicational views of F.X. Dance, Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl (DANCE, 1970).

THE CHURCH – A COMMUNITY OF COMMUNICATION

An example of a place, institution or community of faith where there is communication is the Church. The Church represents a network of communication. To an extent that it is hard and difficult to think of the Church without having to think about its communicational and preaching aspect. The Church is what it is because it's a web of communication. This communication network happens at different levels in the Church, but in this paper, we look mainly at two

important aspects; namely, the Church's organizational structure which is communicational – and the Church's preaching ministry which is also communicational.

However, as a preamble we will give the descriptive definition of communication; that it is the transfer of messages from the sender to the recipient. Nevertheless, this happens in the context of the exchange of the roles of the sender and recipient. There is simultaneous exchange of the sender who not only sends but also listens – and then the recipient who turns into the sender. This exchange is continuous for as long as the communication process takes place.

In the context of the Church, it is that continuous exchange of information between the human being, on one hand, and the institution of the Church, on the other hand. Again, this process is interchangeable – the institution of the Church articulates and sends its communication to the human being and then the human being sends his communication to the institution of the Church as well. That is why, there are now Small Christian Communities, in which each person is capable of articulating their needs. It is in this regard that *Gaudium et Spes* talks of the Church that listens to the joys and sorrows of the human being. The Church as such is communicational (FISKE, 1990).

In fact, other scholars like Avery Dulles, say, the *Church is communications*. The Church exists to save – saving through communication of the saving works of God. The Church was born out of communication – communication of what the Church exists for – namely to be the continuation of the communication of the self-communication of God in history. The Church was born at Pentecost – when our Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit – to tell and say everything that Jesus had promised – that is, to communicate – to communicate everything that would help the disciples to become communicators of the Word.

The circumstances in which the Church was born were communicational – the Holy Spirit communicated God's power in the symbolism of tongues of fire. The sender of the Holy Spirit was God; the recipients were the apostles gathered in one room – the medium of the communication were the tongues of fire and the effect was the communication of the word of God by the

apostles to the people gathered outside. The Church was born in communicational circumstances. The apostles were henceforth sent forth to communicate the word of God not only to the people gathered outside, but that hence forth the word of God would be communicated to the ends of the world.

The Church was born as a public event. It was not a private affair. The communication was not only audible, but there were aspects that were visible like the tongues of fire, the apostles, the people gathered outside, and the house in which the apostles were gathered. These were aspects that were conspicuous to the eye – it was clear that message was being passed from one to the other – the response and feedback was clear. This was public communication.

The communication of the Gospel was at first restricted to few people – to the chosen ones of God – the Israelites – but with time, this communication would be extended not only to the people within but also to everyone including the gentiles – theologically referred to as the inclusivity and exclusivity of the mission.

The Church's mission is to evangelize and teach the good news so that everyone is saved. This involves a lot of communication so that all will come to hear and access the Gospel. The communication inclusiveness of the gospel had as its primary audience or recipient – the Jews, while the audience for the exclusivity of communication was the universal Church, and that basically refers to the catholicity and ecumenicity of the Church – the word of God is directed to every man and woman, to every human being, to everyone as long as they are human – that is the universality of the Church.

That is why everyone is a member of the Church – as long as they are human. That is why the Papal letters are addressed to everyone – to the mentioned and addressed recipients, but also to every one – to every person of good will. Baptism is the gate way to the sacraments – it is the officialization of membership (BERCHMANS, 2002).

The unbaptised have a membership that is unofficialised, but at baptism – there is officialization of membership to the Church – where Church refers to the people of God. It is in this case, that the Church's communication of

the gospel is universal. Universal communication cannot just be left haphazardly, that is, probably why the Vatican has a department that deals with communication. The Vatican also has different departments within the communications office – all this to coordinate universal efforts of communication. There have been different ways in which communication has been understood in the Church.

Mention should also be made here of the different means of communication in the Church, namely, the use of television, use of radios, use of the web, use of print media and different means of communication of the gospel. The word of God is preached through all these ways so that different people can access the word of God.

The communication of the Gospel also takes place through the different letters, encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, homilies, and even messages of the Holy Father and different Vatican departments to the lay faithful but this process is not only uni-directional because the Church listens like a mother to the voice of the lay faithful. Probably that is why the Code of Canon law has a section on the rights of the lay faithful – the people – the members of the Church.

The Vatican II documents also have clearly spelt out the importance of people's voices in *Gaudium et spes* – the joys and sorrows of the people of God. All this shows that in some instances and aspects, the Church's communication is a two-way communication. But there are also situations in which the Church communicates its stand on issues of dogma, faith and morals on which the people of God are invited to reflect on.

The Church's structure and organization is also communicational. Each structure of the Church has to communicate with the other section. One can only think about the communication that takes place between the human being, the Small Christian Community, the Church centre, the Parish, the Diocese, the Metropolitan, the regions, and the universal Church with the Pope as its universal head. There is a continuous flow of communication from top to down and down to top.

That is why we have headed this paper as the Church is the network of communication. There has been a network of communication in which

God the Father sent his Son to communicate the good news of salvation – the Father continues to communicate through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church – and we now live in the age of the Church, a Church that communicates, a Church that has a network of communication all from the beginning heading into the future – moving on until we reach heaven! (STEFANI, 2002)

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