

CHAPTER FOURTEENC O M M U N I C A T I O N S

Theology has been conceived as reflection on religion and, indeed, in the present age as a highly differentiated and specialized reflection. After research, which assembles the data thought relevant, and interpretation, which ascertains their meaning, and history, which finds meanings incarnate in deeds and movements, and dialectic, which investigates the conflicting conclusions of historians, interpreters, researchers, and foundations, which objectifies the horizon effected by intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, and doctrines, which uses foundations as a guide in selecting from the alternatives presented by dialectic, and systematics, which seeks an ultimate clarification of the meaning of doctrine, there finally comes our present concern with the eighth functional specialty, communications.

It is a major concern, for it is in this final stage that theological reflection bears fruit. Without the first seven stages, of course, there is no fruit to be born. But without the last the first seven are in vain, for they fail to mature.

Having insisted on the great importance of this final specialty, I must at once recall the distinction between the methodologist and the theologian. It is up to the theologians to carry out both the first seven specialties and no less the

eighth. The methodologist has the far lighter task of indicating what the various tasks of theologians are and how each presupposes or complements the others.

Concretely, if the reader wishes to contemplate theologians at work in our eighth functional specialty, I would refer him to the five-volume Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie edited by F.X. Arnold, F. Klostermann, K. Rahner, V. Schurr, and L. Weber.¹ In contrast, the concern of the methodologist is simply to present an account of the underlying ideas and directives that seem relevant to such monumental efforts.

1. Meaning and Ontology

In our third chapter we distinguished four functions of meaning: it is cognitive, constitutive, communicative, effective.

Such functions have their ontological aspect. In so far as meaning is cognitive, what is meant is real. In so far as it is constitutive, it constitutes part of the reality of the one that means: his horizon, his assimilative powers, his knowledge, his values, his character. In so far as it is communicative, it induces in the hearer some share in the cognitive, constitutive, or effective meaning of the speaker. In so far as it is effective, it persuades or commands others or it directs man's control over nature.

1) Freiburg - Basel - Wien (Herder) I, 1964; II-I and II-2, 1966; III, 1968; IV, 1969. Some 2652 pages in all.

Such ontological aspects pertain to meaning, no matter what its content or its carrier. They are found then in all the diverse stages of meaning, in all the diverse cultural traditions, in any of the differentiations of consciousness, and in the presence and absence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. Again, they pertain to meaning, whether its carrier is intersubjectivity or art or symbol or exemplary or abominable conduct or everyday or literary or technical language.

2. Common Meaning and Ontology

Community is not just an aggregate of individuals within a frontier, for that overlooks its formal constituent, which is common meaning. Such common meaning calls for a common field of experience and, when that is lacking, people get out of touch. It calls for common or complementary ways of understanding and, when they are lacking, people begin to misunderstand, to distrust, to suspect, to fear, to resort to violence. It calls for common judgments and, when they are lacking, people reside in different worlds. It calls for common values, goals, policies and, when they are lacking, people operate at cross-purposes.

Such common meaning is doubly constitutive. In each individual it is constitutive of the individual as a member of the community. In the group of individuals it is constitutive of the community.

The genesis of common meaning is an ongoing process of communication, of people coming to share the same cognitive, constitutive, and effective meanings. On the elementary level

this process has been described as arising between the self and the other when, on the basis of already existing intersubjectivity, the self makes a gesture, the other makes an interpretative response, and the self discovers in the response the effective meaning of his gesture.² So from intersubjectivity through gesture and interpretation there arises common understanding. On that spontaneous basis there can be built a common language, the transmission of acquired knowledge and of social patterns through education, the diffusion of information, and the common will to community that seeks to replace misunderstanding with mutual comprehension and to change occasions of disagreement into occasions of non-agreement and eventually of agreement.³

a/ As common meaning constitutes community, so divergent meaning divides it. Such division may amount to no more than a diversity of culture and the stratification of individuals into classes of higher and lower competence. The serious division is the one that arises from the presence and absence of intellectual, moral, or religious conversion. For a man is his true self inasmuch as he is self-transcending. Conversion is the way to self-transcendence. Inversely, man is alienated from his true self inasmuch as he refuses self-transcendence, and the basic form of ideology is the self-justification of alienated man.

2) See Gibson Winter, Elements for a Social Ethic, New York (Macmillan) 1966, pb. 1968, pp. 99 ff.

3) See R.G. Collingwood, The New Leviathan, Oxford (Clarendon) 1942, ⁵1966, p. 181 and passim on Platonic dialectic.

Needless to say, the unconverted and especially those that deliberately refused conversion will want to find some other root for alienation and ideology. Indeed, they will want to suggest, directly or indirectly, that self-transcendence is a case or the case of alienation and that ideology is at root the attempt to justify self-transcendence. Once more, then, we are confronted with the radical dialectical opposition that was our concern in our chapter on the fourth functional specialty.

Now, however, our interest is not in dialectic as affecting theological opinions but in dialectic as affecting community, action, situation. It affects community for, just as common meaning is constitutive of community, so dialectic divides community into radically opposed groups. It affects action for, just as conversion leads to intelligent, reasonable, responsible action, so dialectic adds division, conflict, oppression. It affects the situation, for situations are the cumulative product of previous actions and, when previous actions have been guided by the light and darkness of dialectic, the resulting situation is not some intelligible whole but rather a set of misshapen, poorly proportioned, and incoherent fragments.⁴

Finally, the divided community, their conflicting actions, and the messy situation are headed for disaster. For t / l.v. the messy situation is diagnosed differently by the divided

4) On this topic see Insight, pp. 191-206, 218-232, 619-633, 687-730.

community; action is ever more at cross-purposes; and the situation becomes still messier to provoke still sharper differences in diagnosis and policy, more radical criticism of one another's actions, and an ever deeper crisis in the situation.

3. Society, State, Church

Society is studied by sociologists and social historians, the church is studied by ecclesiologists and church historians, the state is studied by political theorists and political historians.

What is studied by historians is particular, concrete, ongoing. It is partly constituted by meaning, and consequently it is changed by any change in its constitutive meaning. Further, it is subject to the distortion and corruption of alienation and ideology, and it may be weakened and destroyed by ridicule and rejection.

On an ancient and traditional view, society is conceived as the organized collaboration of individuals for the pursuit of a common aim or aims. On the basis of this very general definition various kinds of society are distinguished and, among them, the church and the state which are named "perfect" societies on that ground that each in its own sphere possesses ultimate authority. It is to be observed that on this view church and state are not parts within a larger whole but simply instances within a larger class.

For the sociologist or social historian, however, anything that pertains to the togetherness of human beings is

regarded as social. It follows that society must always be conceived concretely and, indeed, the fewer the groups of men living in total isolation from other men, the more there tends to exist a single human society that is worldwide.

It may be objected that this is a merely material view of society, but the objection may be easily countered by adding as formal component the structure of the human good described in chapter two. As the reader may recall, the structure stands on three levels. On a first level one considers the needs and capacities of individuals, their operations which within society become cooperations, and the resultant recurrent instances of the particular good. On a second level one considers their plasticity and perfectibility, their training for assuming roles and performing tasks within already understood and accepted modes and styles of cooperating, and their actual performance which results in the functioning or malfunctioning of the good of order. On a third level one considers individuals as free and responsible, adverts to their basic options for self-transcendence or for alienation, examines their personal relations with other individuals or groups within the society, and notes the terminal values they bring about in themselves and encourage in others.

Since all human beings have needs, and since needs are far better met through cooperation, the social structure of the good is a universal phenomenon. But it is realized in an enormous variety of stages of technological, economic, political, cultural, and religious development. Advance occurs first in pockets. Next it is diffused across frontiers. Finally, as it

is generalized, interdependence grows. The intensification of interdependence leads one to think of society as international, while smaller units such as the empire, the nation, the region, megalopolis, the city begin to be thought of as parts of society.

The ideal basis of society is community, and the community may take its stand on a moral, a religious, or a Christian principle. The moral principle is that men individually are responsible for what they make of themselves, but collectively they are responsible for the world in which they live. Such is the basis of universal dialogue. The religious principle is God's gift of his love, and it forms the basis of dialogue between all representatives of religion. The Christian principle conjoins the inner gift of God's love with its outer manifestation in Christ Jesus and in those that follow him. Such is the basis of Christian ecumenism.

While the ideal basis of society is community, while society does not survive without a large measure of community, it remains that community is imperfect. For the larger and more complex society becomes, the longer and more exacting becomes the training needed for a fully responsible freedom to be possible. To ignorance and incompetence there are added alienation and ideology. Egoists find loop-holes in social arrangements, and they exploit them to enlarge their own share and diminish the share of others in current instances of the particular good. Groups exaggerate the magnitude and importance of their contribution to society. They provide a market for the ideological facade that would justify their ways before the bar of public

opinion. If they succeed in their deception, the social process is distorted. What is good for this or that group, is mistakenly thought to be good for the country or for mankind, while what is good for the country or for mankind is postponed or mutilated. There emerge the richer classes and the poorer classes, and the richer become ever richer, while the poorer sink into misery and squalor. Finally, practical people are guided by common sense. They are immersed in the particular and concrete. They have little grasp of large movements or of long-term trends. They are anything but ready to sacrifice immediate advantage for the enormously greater good of society in two or three decades.

To cope with the problem of imperfect community society develops first procedures and then agencies which have histories of their own. In the modern pluralist democracies there are numerous bodies that largely are self-governing and that pursue any of the specialized ends that have resulted either from the spontaneities of human nature or from the differentiations brought about by human development. Such bodies train personnel, offer roles and set tasks within already understood and accepted styles and modes of cooperation, make their contribution to the good of order by which recurrent needs are met and in which terminal values arise, and in the light of ongoing results revise their procedures.

All such bodies, however, are subject to sovereign states. Such states are territorial divisions within human society. They are ruled by governments that perform legislative,

executive, judicial, and administrative functions. When well run, they promote the good of order within society, and they penalize those that violate it.

But, as already remarked, the ideal basis of society is community. Without a large measure of community, human society and sovereign states cannot function. Without a constant renewal of community, the measure of community already enjoyed easily is squandered. There are needed, then, individuals and groups and, in the modern world, organizations that labor to persuade people to intellectual, moral, and religious conversion and that work systematically to undo the mischief brought about by alienation and ideology. Among such bodies should be the Christian church and to it in its contemporary situation we now turn.

4. The Christian Church and its Contemporary Situation

The Christian church is the community that results from the outer communication of Christ's message and from the inner gift of God's love. Since God can be counted on to bestow his grace, practical theology is concerned with the effective communication of Christ's message.

The message announces what Christians are to believe, what they are to become, what they are to do. Its meaning, then, is at once cognitive, constitutive, effective. It is cognitive inasmuch as the message tells what is to be believed. It is constitutive inasmuch as it crystallizes the hidden inner gift of love into overt Christian fellowship. It is effective inas-

much as it directs Christian service to human society to bring about the kingdom of God.

To communicate the Christian message is to lead another to share in one's cognitive, constitutive, effective meaning. Those, then, that would communicate the cognitive meaning of the message, first of all, must know it. At their service, then, are the seven previous functional specialties. Next, those that would communicate the constitutive meaning of the Christian message, first of all, must live it. For without living the Christian message one does not possess its constitutive meaning; and one cannot lead another to share what one oneself does not possess. Finally, those that communicate the effective meaning of the Christian message, must practise it. For actions speak louder than words, while preaching what one does not practise recalls sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

is | The Christian message, to be communicated to all nations. Such communication presupposes that preachers and teachers enlarge their horizons to include an accurate and intimate understanding of the culture and the language of the people they address. They must grasp the virtual resources of that culture and that language, and they must use those virtual resources creatively so that the Christian message becomes, not disruptive of the culture, not an alien patch superimposed upon it, but a line of development within the culture.

N/own Here the basic distinction is between preaching the gospel and, on the other hand, preaching the gospel as it has been developed within one's own culture. In so far as one preaches the gospel as it has been developed within one's own

culture, one is preaching not only the gospel but also one's own culture. In so far as one is preaching one's own culture, one is asking others not only to accept the gospel but also renounce their own culture and accept one's own.

Now a classicist would feel it was perfectly legitimate for him to impose his culture on others. For he conceives culture normatively, and he conceives his own to be the norm. Accordingly, for him to preach both the gospel and his own culture, is for him to confer the double benefit of both the true religion and the true culture. In contrast, the pluralist acknowledges a multiplicity of cultural traditions. In any tradition he envisages the possibility of diverse differentiations of consciousness. But he does not consider it his task either to promote the differentiation of consciousness or to ask people to renounce their own culture. Rather he would proceed from within their culture and he would seek ways and means for making it into a vehicle for communicating the Christian message.

Through communication there is constituted community and, conversely, community constitutes and perfects itself through communication. Accordingly, the Christian church is a process of self-constitution, a Selbstvollzug. While there still is in use the medieval meaning of the term, society, so that the church may be named a society, still the modern meaning, generated by empirical social studies, leads one to speak of the church as a process of self-constitution occurring within worldwide human society. The substance of that process is the Christian message conjoined with the inner gift of God's love and resulting in Christian witness, Christian fellowship, and Christian service to mankind.

Further, the church is a structured process. As does human society, it trains personnel. It distinguishes roles and assigns to them tasks. It has developed already understood and accepted modes of cooperation. It promotes a good of order in which Christian needs are met regularly, sufficiently, efficiently. It facilitates the spiritual and cultural development of its members. It invites them to transform by Christian charity their personal and group relations. It rejoices in the terminal values that flow from their lives.

The church is an out-going process. It exists not just for itself but for mankind. Its aim is the realization of the kingdom of God not only within its own organization but in the whole of human society and not only in the after life but also in this life.

8 | The church is a redemptive process. The Christian message, incarnate in Christ scourged and crucified, dead and risen, tells not only of God's love but also of man's sin. Sin is alienation from man's authentic being, which is self-transcendence, and sin justifies itself by ideology. As alienation and ideology are destructive of community, so the self-sacrificing love that is Christian charity reconciles alienated man to his true being, and undoes the mischief initiated by alienation and consolidated by ideology.

This redemptive process has to be exercised in the church and in human society generally. It will regard the church as a whole and, again, each of its parts. Similarly, it will regard human society as a whole and, again, its many parts. In

each case ends have to be selected and priorities determined. Resources have to be surveyed and, when, they are inadequate, plans for their increase have to be made. Conditions need to be investigated under which the resources will be deployed for the attainment of the ends. Plans have to be drawn up for the optimal deployment of resources under the existing conditions for the attainment of ends. Finally, the several plans in the several areas and in the church as a whole have to be coordinated.

In the foregoing fashion the Christian church will become not only a process of self-constitution but also a fully conscious process of self-constitution. But to do so it will have to recognize that theology is not the full science of man, that theology illuminates only certain aspects of human reality, that the church can become a fully conscious process of self-constitution only when theology unites itself with all other relevant branches of human studies.

The possibility of each integration is a method that runs parallel to the method in theology. Indeed, the functional specialties of research, interpretation, and history can be applied to the data of any sphere of scholarly human studies. The same three specialties when conceived, not as specialties, but simply as experience, understanding, and judgment, can be applied to the data of any sphere of human living to obtain the classical principles and laws or the statistical trends of scientific human studies.

Now as in theology, so too in historical and empirical human studies scholars and scientists do not always agree. Here too, then, there is a place for dialectic that assembles

differences, classifies them, goes to their roots, and pushes them to extremes by developing alleged positions while reversing alleged counter-positions. Theological foundations, which objectify the horizon implicit in religious, moral, and intellectual conversion, may now be invoked to decide which really are the positions and which really are the counter-positions. In this fashion any ideological intrusion into scholarly or scientific human studies is filtered out.

The notion of dialectic, however, may play a further role. It can be an instrument for the analysis of social process and the social situation. The social historian will ferret out instances in which ideology has been at work. The social scientist will trace its effects in the social situation. The policy maker will devise procedures both for the liquidation of the evil effects and for remedying the alienation that is their source.

The advantage of the second use of dialectic is that the work of the historian and the scientist leads directly to policy. Alienation and ideology are destructive of community; community is the proper basis of society; hence to seek the elimination of alienation and ideology is to promote the good of society.

However, both uses of dialectic would seem to be necessary. The first use gives social scientists and historians a first-hand acquaintance with alienation and ideology; the dialectic is applied to their own work. Just as the psychiatrist in his didactic learns about neurosis in himself, so too the

social historian and scientist will have sharper eyes for alienation and ideology in the processes they study, if similar phenomena have been criticized in their own work.

Corresponding to doctrines, systematics, and communications in theological method, integrated studies would distinguish policy making, planning, and the execution of the plans. Policy is concerned with attitudes and ends. Planning works out the optimal use of existing resources for attaining the ends under given conditions. Execution generates feedback. This supplies scholars and scientists with the data for studies on the wisdom of policies and the efficacy of the planning. The result of such attention to feedback will be that policy making and planning become ongoing processes that are continuously revised in the light of their consequences.

We have been indicating a method, parallel to the method of theology, for integrating theology with scholarly and scientific human studies. The aim of such integration is to generate well-informed and continuously revised policies and plans for promoting good and undoing evil both in the church and in human society generally. Needless to say, such integrated studies will have to occur on many levels, local, regional, national, international. The principles of subsidiarity will require that at the local levels problems will be defined and, in so far as possible, solutions worked out. Higher levels will provide exchange centers, where information on successful and unsuccessful solutions is accumulated to be made available to inquiries and so prevent the useless duplication of investigations. They will also work on the larger and more intricate

problems that have no solution at the lower levels, and they will organize the lower levels to collaborate in the application of the solutions to which they conclude. Finally, there is a general task of coordination, of working out in detail what kinds of problem are prevalent, at what level they are best studied, how all concerned on any given type of issue are to be organized for a collaborative effort.

I have been speaking mainly of the redemptive action of the church in the modern world. But no less important is its constructive action. In fact, the two are inseparable, for one cannot undo evil without also bringing about the good. Still one will be taking a very superficial and rather sterile view of the constructive side of Christian action, if one thinks only of forming policies, planning operations, and carrying them out. There is the far more arduous task (1) of effecting an advance in scientific knowledge, (2) of persuading eminent and influential people to consider the advance both thoroughly and fairly, and (3) of having them convince practical policy makers and planners both that the advance exists and that it implies such and such revisions of current policies and planning with such and such effects.

In conclusion let me say that such integrated studies correspond to a profound exigence in the contemporary situation. For ours is a time of ever increasing change due to an ever increasing expansion of knowledge. To operate on the level of our day is to apply the best available knowledge and the most efficient techniques to coordinated group action. But to meet

this contemporary exigence will also set the church on a course of continual renewal. It will remove from its action the widespread impression of complacent irrelevance and futility. It will bring theologians into close contact with experts in very many different fields. It will bring scientists and scholars into close contact with policy makers and planners and, through them with clerical and lay workers engaged in applying solutions to the problems and finding ways to meet the needs both of Christians and of all mankind.

5. The Church and the Churches

I have been speaking vaguely of the Christian church. In fact, the church is divided. There exist different confessions of faith. There are defended different notions of the church. Different groups cooperate in different ways.

Despite such differences there exist both a real and an ideal unity. The real unity is the response to the one Lord in the one Spirit. The ideal unity is the fruit of Christ's prayer: "...may they all be one..." (John 17, 21). At the present time that fruit is ecumenism.

In so far as ecumenism is a dialogue between theologians, our chapters on Dialectic and on Doctrines indicate the methodical notions that have occurred to us. But ecumenism also is a dialogue between churches and then largely it operates within the framework of the World Council of Churches and under the directives of particular churches. Illustrative of such directives is the decree on ecumenism issued by the second

Vatican council.

While the existence of division and the slowness in recovering unity are deeply to be lamented, it is not to be forgotten that division resides mainly in the cognitive meaning of the Christian message. The constitutive meaning and the effective meaning are matters on which most Christians very largely agree. Such agreement, however, needs expression and, while we wait common cognitive agreement, the possible expression is collaboration in fulfilling the redemptive and constructive roles of the Christian church in human society.