Communication

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Words of Spirituality
by ENZO BIANCHI
The Word of God that is communicated to us, and in which God gives himself to us in Christ, is the true beginning of Christian communication

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The quality of our life is determined by the quality of our relationships, which form the substance of our life. The quality of our relationships depends on the quality of our communication, at each of its levels: with ourselves, at an interpersonal, social or political level, etc. Christians find the model for their communication at a theological level, in God's communication of himself to humanity in Christ. Clearly, the problem of communication in the church cannot be reduced to the question of new technology and the need to take advantage of the opportunities it provides to reach a wider audience more effectively. If we recall that according to biblical revelation, the Holy Spirit is God's free will to communicate and enter into communion with men and women, we will understand that Christian communication can be truly sacramental - that is, it can convey something of the Trinitarian reality that gives the church its foundation and reason for existing, and toward which the church refers us - only if it invokes and lets itself be shaped by the Spirit's action. Christian communication should also seek to conform itself to the image of Christ, who, on the cross, "brings humanity back to a God who is not truly God except insofar as he is Communication itself" (Gustave Martelet).

This dimension of communication as revelation is joined to communication's anthropological dimension. In human terms, communication means above all 'giving,' making public what is ours and sharing it with others, and at the same time preparing ourselves to receive something from others. It is not a one-way process but a circular, reciprocal, and interactive movement in which the partners involved exchange signs and messages in the hope of reaching a mutual understanding and agreement. This exchange never leaves unchanged those who take part in it: our identity is shaped during communication. Since we are communicative beings, no aspect of human behavior is exempt from this law! "With or without action, words or silence always have a communicative character" (Paul Watzlawick).It is clear that this is true not only for individuals, but also for all human groups, and therefore for the church. One of the ways we can evaluate the church's faithfulness to the Gospel is by looking at the quality of its relationships: the relationships that exist within the church, the relationships one Christian denomination establishes with another, the way the church approaches those who do not believe in God and those who belong to other religious traditions, the way it defines its presence in the world, its relationships with secular institutions, etc.

It is here that the church runs the risk of changing the Gospel, the good news of God's communication to humanity, into bad communication. This happens when parresía, the evangelical boldness of Christ's disciples, gives way to the timidity and subservience of officials in an ecclesiastical institution; when

authority, instead of remaining at the service of communion, degenerates into an arrogant display of power; when the ecclesial community plays favorites, privileging some and marginalizing others; when censorship, duplicity, hypocrisy, and half-truths create that climate of fear that is a direct contradiction of the evangelical freedom inspired by the Spirit; when dialogue is shunned rather than pursued, and so on. It is only when the Christian community makes itself an environment where authentic freedom is possible that it also becomes a space for discussion, dialogue and communication among brothers and sisters! Community life, which is the face of the Christian community and the fundamental form of testimony the church offers humanity, depends on communication. Communication is an art, not a technique, and it is an art that demands humility. It is not an overflowing fullness, an expression of an 'extra' or a 'too much;' rather, it arises from an emptiness, an awareness of a lack, a need. When we communicate, we express our need for others, we acknowledge that we depend on them and owe our life to them, and we confess that the gift of God, the *munus* from which our communication arises, precedes us.

The Word of God that is communicated to us, and in which God gives himself to us in Christ, is the true beginning of Christian communication, a form of communication in which we are already immersed before we become aware of our participation and accept this participation as our responsibility. Those who know how to communicate are those who recognize their own ontological poverty as the truth of who they are. And those who know that they are poor are also able to pray, to communicate with God and respond to the gift of his Word, because they know how to listen and receive. It is on the foundation of this poverty that community, life together with others, can be built up: community life is always the fruit of bearing together each member's poverty and weakness, rather than the sum of the strength of all. The Christian community is a fruit of the Spirit, a sign of God's communication to men and women, a sacrament of the gift that is the Word of God, and a loving response to God, who first loved us. God, "who is in himself Triune communion, creates communion with and among human beings by communicating his life to them, and asks that this life be communicated in turn to each brother and sister until it reaches all of creation" (Roberto Mancini).

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