

COMMUNICATION THEOLOGY

- Topic:** Narrative and Communication Theology in a Postliterate Culture
Convener: Bernard R. Bonnot, Unda-USA
Moderator: Paul C. Duffy, Center for the Study of Communication and Culture, Saint Louis University
Presenters: Terrence W. Tilley, University of Dayton
Angela Ann Zukowski, Unda International
Respondents: Edmund Arens, University of Münster
Clare Colella, Caritas Telecommunications,
Diocese of San Bernardino, Unda-USA

Tilley proposed that media both *affect* us and *effect* 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 meaning 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 postliterate 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 today 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. As San Diego's Herbert Marcuse taught, communication can be used to either effect or distort communi-

ty. Accordingly, theology needs a critical theory of communication which will 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 communications spectrum—preliterate, literate, and postliterate. J. Redmont and G. Baum underlined the pastoral challenge of this complex situation. M. Campbell noted that students think very differently from their teachers and have great difficulty stepping outside their stream of consciousness.

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

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THEOLOGY IN A SEMINARY CONTEXT

Topic: "Foundations," Truth, and Narrative in Catholic Theology

Convener: Jack A. Bonsor, St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park

Moderator: Roger E. McGrath, St. Mary's Seminary and University

Presenters: John C. Haughey, Loyola University, Chicago

John E. Thiel, Fairfield University

John Thiel reprised philosophical critiques of foundationalism and indicated their influence within Protestant theology. He noted the work of Lindbeck and Thiemann. These thinkers hold that "foundational theologies are misguided from beginning to end in their ascription of authority to spurious universals and in their concomitant willingness to trade the integrity of the gospel message for