

RESEARCH GROUP

COMMUNICATION THEOLOGY

- Topic: Publishing Project in Communication Theology
Convener: Frances Forde Plude, Notre Dame College
Moderator: Bob (Bernard R.) Bonnot, Hallmark Channel
Presenter: Paul A. Soukup, S.J. Santa Clara University
Respondent: Steve Hrycyniak, Sheed & Ward Publishers

The session brainstormed publication possibilities against the background of the developing field of communication theology. Bob Bonnot reviewed the nine years of Program Group sessions within CTSA, the capstone of that effort in having David Robinson as a plenary presenter this year, and the shift now to Research Group status. Paul Soukup recalled the attention given to communication at the Second Vatican Council and in subsequent documents; the history of the international Jesuit Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture from its 1977 founding in London to its "virtual" base now at Santa Clara University (<http://cscs.scu.edu>); his 1983 review of the literature on communication and theology for the Centre; and the series of Cavalletti seminars in Italy that resulted in the Sheed & Ward series of books on Communication, Culture and Theology. He announced the continuation of that series under his joint editorship with Fran Plude.

Fran Plude distributed three items and noted other documentation available, including an updated annotated list of publications. She explained the work of the International Commission on Religion, Communication and Culture and announced the Commission's funding of full doctoral scholarships for five candidates each from Africa, Asia and South America (cf. www.jmcommunications.com/fellowships).

Steve Hrycyniak, Co-CEO of Sheed & Ward, affirmed the continuing commitment of that press to its academic series on Communication, Culture and Theology while considering also popular and pastoral titles and formats. He noted that publications that simultaneously appeal to three distinct markets—book stores, institutional religious education, and the academy—work best for S&W. He offered S&W's assistance in finding an apt publisher for worthy proposals that do not fit S&W.

Against this background, those present offered thoughts on potentially fruitful directions for the further development of the field in the context of this CTSA Research Group. The following ideas surfaced.

- The media make us consumers. Theology needs to help people become agents: how can theology be transformational when interfacing with the media today?
- An emphasis on being agents can accent control. The current crisis in the Church manifests a need also for vulnerability, as modeled by Pope John Paul II.
- Explore and apply the dominant theological theme of "communio" to communication.
- Develop the symbolic mode of thinking, doing theology and communicating in the context of *communio*, as in the sacraments, liturgy, and eucharist.
- Probe Lonergan's emphasis that communication is the apex of theology and a challenge to the other dimensions of theology.
- Deepen understanding of the core principles on which people base their lives, which shape all communication they receive.
- Develop awareness of author, recipient, and observer/consumer.
- Schools and parishes need timely instructional resources with good theology.
- How can theology help bring everyone to the conversation in a fragmented, "market-segmented" world? Beyond "dialog" (which often means duo-log), there is a need for "poly-log."
- Consider communication across the life cycle and the church's need to do intergenerational communication.
- Theology and its expression need to encourage and enable people to express themselves, moving them from consumption to generosity (e.g. "God's Photo Album" and "Letters to Mothers and Fathers").
- Consider use of CD-roms, hypertext publication, and alternative modes of access to theology's fruits, such as the arts—plays, paintings, performance, creative self-expression.

With these ideas and emphases, the 2003 Research Group on Communication Theology in Cincinnati will work on two specific publications: (1) an expansion of David Robinson's plenary challenge to move theology beyond the "Gutenberg Hologram"; and (2) an exploration of *Communio* in the context of Lonergan's emphasis on communication as a major functional specialty within theology—both including pastoral application.

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