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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vol. 10 No. 2 2012

ARTICLES

- Asian Research Center for Religion
and Social Communication: Origin and Activities 115
Franz-Josef Eilers, svd
- The Communication Signatures of Religion -
Re-vented in a Social Media Environment? 122
Thomas A. Bauer
- Jesus Christ as Communicator:
A Biblical Perspective 158
Lucien Legrand, mep
- Unfolding Religious Communication System:
A Methodological Approach 176
Sebastian Periannan

REPORTS

- 5th ARC Roundtable: Religion and Communication in a
Multi-Religious Setting-- An Asian Perspective 190
- 10 Years of "Religion and Social Communication" --
Journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion
and Social Communication 197
Franz-Josef Eilers, svd
- Thai Pilgrimage to the Golden Buddha 199
Phyo Hein Wai

- NOTES 215





BOOK REVIEWS

216

BOOK NOTES

223



**ASIAN RESEARCH CENTER FOR RELIGION AND
SOCIAL COMMUNICATION (ARC):
ORIGIN AND ACTIVITIES ¹**

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

A group of Asian researchers from seven Asian countries gathered at a consultation held at the Assumption University in cooperation with St. John's University in Bangkok in 1999. There a proposal for a research center for Religion and Social Communication was endorsed.

The initiative for this consultation came from the Office of Social Communication of the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) based in Manila. The participants' proposal was taken up by St. John's University and the center officially opened there in November 25, 1999.

In the beginning, there were some initiatives of collecting documents, starting a newsletter and a website making especially Church-related documents available. A list of addresses of researchers was initiated but without developing its full potential.

A research library originally developed by a similar initiative of the Jesuits in London was moved to the center in 2003. It still exists to this day with almost 4,000 books that were published mainly during the 1970s to 1980s. They give an overview on the subject of Religion and Social Communication of those days. Recently, new books have been added. All titles will be available soon on the ARC website.

Right from the beginning of the center, research was envisaged beyond Christianity. Soon it became clear that such studies should be a concern for all religions in the different cultures of Asia. Therefore, the research base had to be extended still under the main headings which were foreseen right from the beginning. They are:

¹ ARC is located at Saint John's University, Ladprao, Bangkok 10900 Thailand.

1. **Communication within Religions** which would study especially the communication means and processes within a religion or religious community.
2. **Religion, Communication and Society** which would devote itself to the inter-link between the communication of a religion and its effect and influences on human society which is thus also the subject of “social communication” as the communication of and in human society. Here also the media of society in relation to religion come in: how do they reflect and report about religion and religious life?
3. **Religion, Communication and Culture** devotes itself especially to the study of relations and inter-links between communication and culture: how does culture influence ways and means of religions or religious activities, but also how do religions in their way of communication influence culture ... and the lives of people? In a call for papers (2010), some of these themes and concerns were listed in more detail in the following questions which are, however, by far not exhaustive:

- How does Religion influence the communication of and in Asian societies?
- What are the traditional communicative expressions in and of Asian Religions?
- Is religious communication in Asian Religions changed through modern technologies (Media)? How?
- What are the different communicative means used by Religions traditionally and in modern times? How are they adjusted, when and where?
- Are the ways of sharing religious experiences and content today different from the Past and Today? With what consequences?
- How are religious convictions and messages communicated to members of the same Religion and to other people?
- Does religious communication change humans, communities and political situations? Does Religious Communication contribute to the daily lives of people? How
- How can Social Communication contribute to Interreligious

Dialogue and mutual understanding?

- Does religious communication change lives of peoples and societies? How? When?

In another proposal for a Research Agenda, the concerns for special studies were broken down into the following groups of possible research according to the means, recipients, and interrelations in communication processes:

1. Study the use of means of communication - traditional and modern – by religious groups: Programs –
 - Content
 - Presentation
 - Frequency
 - Style
 - Impact
2. Study the recipients/ audiences of religious communication:
 - Composition and size
 - Age
 - Expectations
 - Interactivity
 - Effects
 - Priorities in media/ communication means ... habits
 - Ethics and human dignity
3. Study the interrelation between:
 - Communication and culture
 - Different ways and means of communication (“multimedia”)
 - Religious practices and the role of communication in the process
 - Theology/ Philosophy and communication
 - Anthropology, religion and social communication
 - Communication dimension of interreligious dialogue

- Intercultural communication and religion

The following initiatives of the Center emerged as a permanent concern and somehow a permanent structure of activities beside the library in Bangkok.

1. **ARC Journal**

The “Religion and Social Communication, Journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC)” started in 2003 as a regular activity of the Center. The founder and that time Dean of St. John University’s Graduate School for Religion and Philosophy, Prof. Kirti Bunchua, was the first editor. He succeeded the first ARC Director, Maryknoll Fr. James Kofski, who set the first steps for the center since 1999. As a first step in those days, he had developed an extensive documentation website, which was to quite an extent Church-oriented. A newsletter also existed for a short time to support a network of researchers.

The “Journal” is published twice a year which means once every academic semester. It features original articles but also presentations from ARC Roundtables and covers a variety of fields – from philosophy, theology, culture in relation to social communication as a communication of and in human society.

The contributions from different Asian countries are in no way confined to technical means (media) but are especially concerned about culture and cultural/religious expressions. The publication, which goes mainly to the members of the ARC Research network and their institutions, also includes occasional reports and professional information as well as reviews of books which have a special relation to the field.

Now on its 10th year (2003-2012) of publication, the ARC Journal has become an important instrument for research and thinking far

beyond the center in Bangkok, and even beyond Asia.

2. Annual Roundtable

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Communication of the ARC at Saint John's University in Bangkok (Thailand) has actually emerged, since 2010, as a regular academic activity of the Research Center.

Normally held under a certain theme and at Saint John's University in Bangkok, the Roundtable is confined to a small group of researchers. The group is composed of some 25 researchers to secure proper discussion and deeper sharing. The participation is by invitation only. Participants are expected to submit and present a paper in line with the theme of the conference or/and the concerns of the Center.

The conferences try to study the field of social communication as the communication of and in human society in Asia. This refers not only to the media and technology but to all means and ways of communicating in human Culture related to Religion.

Though the conferences usually are held in Bangkok, where the center is based, they can also move to other countries if the theme of the gathering warrants and a special interest proposes such a shift. Financial considerations, however, also play a decisive role.

Thus in 2012, the 'Roundtable' was for the first time held outside Bangkok and moved to the "Mudra Institute of Communications" in Ahmedabad (MICA), India. With the theme "Religion and Communication in a Multi-Religious Setting: An Asian Perspective" it was mainly devoted to Research on communication in a multi-religious society, like India. Presentations came from different religions, like from Sikhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism.

The Roundtable gathering is normally held in the middle of October

every year because this is semestral break in many Asian countries and thus fits more easily into the academic calendar of participants.

The conferences study Religion in Social Communication as the communication of and in human society in Asia. This refers not only to media and technology but to all means and ways of communicating in human Culture related to Religion.

Participation in one Roundtable does, however, not automatically also guarantee participation in succeeding Roundtables. All participants (past and present), however, will become part of the “ARC Researchers’ Network” and will receive free copies of the bi-annual ARC Journal “Religion and Social Communication” as well as other publications of the Center such as the upcoming ARC Book Series titled “Religion and Social Communication,” which will be published in cooperation with the publishing house of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila. Participants and Network members are also free to propose and contribute research articles for ARC Journal as well as the book series.

Aside from contributing to the meeting expenses, ARC tries to partly share in the travel expenses of its Roundtable participants.

The theme of the Roundtable for each year will be discussed at the annual gathering but will be decided on by the academic board of the ARC.

3. ARC Book Series

As a result of the Journal and also of the Roundtables, a book series on “Religion and Social Communication” is envisaged with at least three volumes as a first step. They will contain some of the studies of the past but will also break new ground. The series will be published in cooperation with the Graduate School of the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, the oldest university in Asia (1611), and in their publishing house (UST Publishing House). The first volumes are

expected to be released in 2013.

4. The Development of a Researchers' Network

The development of a network of researchers in the field of religion and social communication was initiated already in the beginning of the Center but unfortunately, not much developed. Many of the authors of the articles published in the Journal and participants of the Roundtables are on the list which needs further development and probably also a more permanent information structure: Here latest publications, books and articles of the network members can be announced and relevant ideas, proposals for research as well as special insights and experiences in the field of Religion and Social Communication shared.

5. The ARC Website

A new website of the center is under construction and will be further developed to respond to the direction and needs of the center. St. John's University (SJU) with their IT section stands for quality in the technical sense but we need more professional input. We hope to develop this in the coming months so that in 2013, a new content of the website can be presented. The plan is to also include interactive possibilities for the network members in planning and proposal for Research. A "Network Members only" section should become discussion ground and an opportunity to share ongoing studies and experiences in the field of Religion and Social Communication.

THE COMMUNICATION SIGNATURES OF RELIGION -- RE-EVENTED IN A SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT?

Thomas A. Bauer

What communication is like depends very much on the character of its mediation. There is no communication without or outside any media environment – understanding media environment as the social setting, the institutional or situational agreement (“mediality”) of mutual observation. Communication happens as observation as well as action. That remains a question of decision for paradigm (cf. Bauer 2011). In a so-called media society, societal institutions are increasingly assimilated into the logic of media communication. In that sense, technical politics becomes media politics (i.e., politics is done by media and for media). Economy is becoming a media made (virtual) information system before it emerges in its technical dimensions. Education is increasingly overtaken by the media and is searching for conditions to survive within the structures of media communication. This process of assimilation did not and certainly will not stop at religion. Religion is increasingly becoming a media religion, which takes over the media formats (Bauer 2002: 483 ff.) in the interest of its own societal representation. This appropriation of partial systems by media is – if so far considered system, theoretically – not done by media as such, but is the consequence of modernity (cf. Giddens 1990): systems become as we observe them. As systems in organized societies find themselves in mutual competition for legitimacy, trust and attention, they all concentrate their self-reflexive attention to communication – what means in terms of mediality of the society: they increasingly regenerate (re-develop, re-constitute) in the mode of mediality (cf. Bauer 2011: 471).

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When talking about the media, there often predominates the idea of a technically organized system which operates as a self-sufficient circle, because it is used by producers and consumers primarily in the interest of exchange of information, knowledge, news, or entertainment. This technically organized system is thus getting connected to a community or connected to each other as a community of interests and experiences. Being connected and not becoming isolated seems to be the strongest motivation to use media as a confirmation reference to know what others may know; and to know that others might know what I know, or even presuppose that I should know what they know. Framed by such an imagination of inter-relation, media is supposed to be a self-sufficient system that operates technically. As such, it is taken into service for other meta-systems like politics, economy, culture, education, etc. That notion of media correlates to everyday practice and simply is a practical theory, but it is not complex enough to analyse, to explain, or even to resolve theoretically any media communication problems. Beyond this practical conception, built on functional perspectives and technical interests to organize everyday life as practical as possible, a comprehensive social-scientific theory has to go further than such practical theory. It cannot be satisfied being primarily interested in a structural or functional description (i.e., what media is in relation to communication). Rather, it is challenged to ask why individuals, societies, and communities trust in media as the social environment of communication, and why they believe in communication as the social practice of constitution of themselves.

Such an approach demands a cultural theoretical concept of media and communication, since it is asking about the construction of meaning, i.e. what we observe and why we consider it as we observe it. In so doing, a social and cultural theory of media and communication is a critical observation of practical observation (Schmidt 2004:7). In the generalized notion of media, media is seen as a system which individuals, societies, and communities use to exchange information, opinion, and meaning; and through that, organize their interests of identity, of getting connected, but being distinguished of understanding each other, of being

coherent but free and self-determined, etc. It opens a cultural horizon of interpreting the sociability of individuals and communities and, as well, of the communicability of societies. It assumes an essential challenge for the cultural program of social communication, which refers to the notion that media – when relating it to communication – is more than just a technical infrastructure or a system of exchange. At the level of social and cultural theory observation, media is the cultural concept of social practice as well as a social concept for cultural practice. Media is a social program of a mutual attribution of a mutually expected social attention; it is the topography of where and how to meet in order to recall the notion of life's sociability. Shaped into industrially designed organisation of production and consumption, it is the usage of media (infrastructure) that turn a media system into the media, or rather a medium (Flusser/Wagnermaier/Zielinski, 2009). This use can be twofold: social and socialized on both sides and in both roles of the industrialized order of media communication; that is, in the role of producer and in the role of consumer. The social use of media refers to media as a social practice of building relation or referring to relation. In this sense, social media is used in the interest and for the purpose of getting connected through communication to any generalized other, who is supposed to use the same infrastructure in somehow the same interest and purpose to communicate. The socialized use of media refers to the habit of using media as means of information and communication. This usage occurs in the way the technical application of media allows or requires technically to get connected to a media-operated and media-provided system of distribution of news content.

Following that logic of media, the theoretical perspective should be switched from a technical and structural perspective to a social and cultural one. This change in perspective allows and demands to widen and to open the theoretical horizon from a media-for-communication concept to a *mediality-of-communication* concept. In this conception, media theory analyzes the program of mediality as a cultural environment of social communication. It is the mediality of society, of societies, of communities and even of individuals that changes the ontology of

social communication from a mutually negotiated attention to a next-to-next connecting chain of social attention.

Outlining a Contextual Media Theory

To assess the cultural implications of media development and to understand the ontological dimension of media change in reference to the structural construction of societies and communities, a more sophisticated model of the media rather than a simple technological model is needed. Media is a contextual model of action and observation; only in that theoretical design does it make sense to relate media with communication (Bauer 2011: 466, Schmidt 2003: 27). Talking about social media in the context of the question what that version of media means to the structural and cultural change of religion, and what could be the chances and challenges for religions in general to become (as well as media) more social and less socialized, demands more than a one-dimensional concept. To understand and to analyze religious communication in the context of and in reference to the usage of media, demands to enrich the theoretical concept of media by a contextual perspective of social practice. This alternative perspective conceives media as a social model of mutual notice on the basis of reference to the social agreement of and for communication (Bauer 2011:5o7 ff.). Such a comprehensive media concept goes beyond the technological, technical, or organizational structures. Rather, it conceptualizes media as a context or connectivity of social practice in relation to a technological system that represents or even governs technically the connectivity of mutually related actions. That perspective focuses on what it culturally (community- and identity- values) means when using a (special) media infrastructure as the symbolic frame for the exchange of experience and opinion among specially meant addressees. Talking about media, then, means to talk about the individual and the collective, social, cultural, and symbolic environment (context of living) of media usage. With respect to cultural change, what is interesting is not Facebook or Twitter itself, but its (cultural) habitus to use the technology. The technical items do not have their order, aesthetics, or ethical values by themselves, but the

attribution is assigned when using them.

The theoretical concept of *Symbolic Interaction* states that people communicate by means of and in relation to symbolic codes that are archived through a cultural program and are individually learned by cultural socialization (Mead 1972, Blumer 1973). This was a first step to that contextual conception, but it did not go far enough. Symbolic Interactionism theorizes communication as a social agreement under the condition of a mutually supposed expectation; namely that each one is acting within symbolic structures within the context of a cultural program. *The concept of contextualized usage of media* goes further than the one of symbolic interaction. Communication does not just happen as an exchange of whatever content is being placed into operation by any infrastructure. Rather, it operates itself opening a communicatively meant relation through a negotiation on the mediating setting. This usually is done by a mutually accepted agreement of what condition of relation (for example, role model) the situation presupposes, or it has to be clarified by gestures or otherwise attributed connotations as long as the situational framing is supposed to be somehow harmonized. Communication starts with the negotiation for a common social (or behavioural) code of framing: the social setting, the media setting then frames the encoding and decoding, the cognition and connotation of what is exchanged to become a relevant matter. Summarizing that theoretical perspective, the media (or the medium) is a metaphor of and for the description of a context-driven complex social mechanism of mutually passed on signals of expectations which are meant to build a common frame of trust, which in technical (mass) media by far are already set by the technical design and habit of use of the media (Bauer 2011: 486, Hepp 2008). It is obvious that such a concept of media provides another view to and a broader perspective for a theoretical interpretation of how social media touch the general social discourse on religion and its position in execution of individual and collective life.

The time and the society we are living in are globally signified by the media; and, in the context of technological development by the

structural and cultural changes of communication. The classical mass media has been technologically developed and technically working in an industry-economic system confined by the logics of distribution of the organization of acting (usage of media) between production and consumption. This order of division of an integrative symbolic acting is also valued as a distinction of competence according to the tradition of hierarchy. The mixture of technological know-how, economic capacity, organizational hierarchy, and mystification of responsibility has built a social mechanism of trust that has turned the media, in the mode of distributive mass media, into an agency of organization of social communication and an institution of and for values in a democratic society. These values include freedom of speech and opinion, right of information and communication and option of discursive participation. The industrial order so far is still of value in a communication society. It is still the plausible model for understanding media as an agency of and for the development of societies. Any further organizational step in technology or in institution-building that affirmed this system was and still is taken as a confirmation of the reasonability of the mode the system works with.

Not only within the professional environment (journalism, advertisement, public relations, etc.) but also within scientific analysis (journalism research, media studies, content research, public relations research, etc.) this structural logic has been used, as long as it frames social (media) communication as a symbolic interaction program of an organized society. The perspective is and was that mass media do the social communication in a way that they structure the society's symbolic interaction. It never was thought seriously to turn the perspective the other way around: social communication do the media. Indeed that is, in short, the cultural message of the so-called "social media." Mass media do not really generate social communication, but they foster the socialisation of societal patterns of communication. The social media irritate the socialized order of communication, but they foster an open source model of societal mass-connection (cf. Faßler 2001)

It seems almost that the turn from mass media communication to media-mass-communication (Bauer 2011: 535 ff), what social media is like, came somehow surprising over a supposedly well-ordered world of public media communication. The euphemistically so-called social media do not only change the surface of society's media communication, but it changes its ontology from an organizational and institution-like system to a system that is less closed, much more oriented on structures of an organism. That system is seeking values of sustainability less in effects but more in its options of connecting people according to their interests through participation. Each observation is constructive, since it builds meaning and sense. The constructive paradigm of observation of change – constituted and codified through communication – is time: Time is the conceptual model (order) of construction of a meaningful relation of the society to an extended (overall) measure of contingent meaning through which societies are considered to be in a state of change. Within this consideration they increasingly become aware of the fact that they are what their communication is like (cf. Bauer 2011a: 145, Foucault 1974, Neverla 2007). The concept of agenda setting (media use structures the attention and the execution of everyday life (cf. McComb 2004) confirms that assumption through a series of empirical findings.

The Cultural Design of Sociability in Social Media Usage

The social media movement follows to some extent new paradigms of communication. Paradigms which signify liberation from organized collectiveness in the manner of mass media rituals in everyday life as well as in basic systems like politics and economy. For example, more individuality, more spontaneity, more personal choice of topics of people to get connected with. But on the other hand, there is still an economic background behind all infra-technological arrangements like Facebook, Twitter or other similar Net or social media versions that satisfy their economic interest on the shoulder of an obviously ever unsatisfied need for connectivity, togetherness, and belongingness. Communication then becomes a metaphor for not being left in loneliness and social

unaccountability. Communication is experiencing an old ritual in new technological environments: becoming friends and being connected to friends. But all that happens in an easy and relaxed way, since the system overtakes the role of acquisition, organization, responsibility, duty and control. It reminds you with more or less pressure to follow the expectations of the connected others. Expectation matters: you cannot disappoint someone in a system you yourself do not want to get disappointed in because of your need for attention and acceptance. Identity has become a work in progress of media and through media usage; an attempt to come to terms with the natural, social, cultural, and symbolic environment (Schorb 2009, Busch 2001). In that system, a friend is someone who is supposed to have something in common with oneself. That already is sufficient to create or to simulate mutually a community, as you become connected to friends of your friends, even if the intrinsic reasons for becoming friends gets mixed up with any other probably unknown reasons. The system then enlarges its circulation and develops into a dispositive for the *communification* of any other reasonability. As a result, the system is disposed to become a social frame (expectation and fulfilling expectations, internal trust, rituals of friendship: attention, help, assistance) for more and for other affairs to get or to be connected and to get engaged for.

That social mechanism, combined with the technological option of instantability, ubiquity and speed, of course, has the potential to be used for political (cf. “Arab Spring” movement) as well as for any other social affairs (cf. “Occupy Wall Street” – movement) and tempts to believe that “free media” liberates in-itself-closed societies. The developments in Egypt, Libya and Iran have shown that the moral power of gathering people for common affairs, and to express a collective stand against something by far is not yet the same (not enough) as the ethical energy of communication that is needed in order to build a community connected by values of freedom, autonomy and sovereignty. Distinguishing two energetic models of communication (discourse and dialogue; cf. Flusser 1998: 16 ff.), there might be power of discourse but weakness of dialogue in those kind of social media communication.

Discourse is understood to be the mode of communication used in order to spread and to repeat information, knowledge, notion, and affairs. Dialogue is understood to be the mode of communication that creates and builds notion, knowledge, as well as common affairs. The mode of discourse follows simple structures of hierarchy and simple principles of leadership. The mode of dialogue is characterized by a dialectic order of finding community through the interest in difference of views and perspectives. Therefore, dialogical modes of communication demand much more sophisticated structures of participation, much more ethical investment in communication (standpoint-reliability, authenticity, responsibility for truth, acceptance, tolerance, etc – cf. Bauer 2009: 57), but it is the communication modus of and for freedom. With this differentiation it might be easy to confirm by analysis, which has not been sufficiently done yet, that the communicational substance – related to its dialogical mode – within the social media sphere of Facebook and Twitter is too short, too invested in producing or getting simple and fast messages across in order to be able to blue-print or to simulate a mood of an open community that is built on the principle of individuality.

So far the sociability character of social media repeats the *hop-on-drop-off-mode* of sight-seeing buses, by which people in the role of distant visitors or tourists get a quick impression of a city environment. However they do not dive in, do not become responsible for what they are seeing and usually choose (select) to keep in media memory (pictures), what they think would be worth to remember or could be nice to show to others. Within the bus, the people share a common setting of perception (media) though being individually interested in somehow the same. The social (*mediality*) setting of that situation is being on the same route (routine) to mutually animate each other to take a picture or at least notice what any other is supposed and expected to do. The sociability reaches so far as they are doing the same, but each of them is doing it in relation to personal/individual and distinctive social rebounds. Such a situation is simulative; that is, the situation is not a community as a habit but as behaviour. It might be as well just a simulation of difference as it is a simulation of commonality that is

not meant for an in-depth distinction as it is not meant for an in-depth going community. This is typical for a *next-to-next society* (Taylor 2002: 76 ff.): everyone just takes and gives each other the same right to do the same thing and to match and realize the same goal under same conditions of investment (skills for using the infrastructure) and outcome (declaration of interest).

Does Religion Need an Institution?

What is relevant to the question, whether this kind of social media communication could be a dispositive of cultural understanding of religion, is the fact that and the reason why we think that this could affect our traditional understanding of religion. Across all cultures there is, of course, a common notion that religion is a matter of communication (Bauer 1980, Taylor 2002). What keeps the world connected as a whole and as an integrated complex are its stories and discourses. What keeps religion to be identified as such, is what it tells about itself and what is told about it. All religions are social contexts of belief in divine messages, of grand narrations and of traditions and rituals of sharing and communicating the truths of and in it. But besides this pragmatic aspect, communication matters in respect to the constitutional and constructive identity of religion. In that context, the media change mirrors the social change in general. As traditional media embody a social institution (system) of communication and religion embodies a social institution (system) of faith and belief, the social change in general goes into the direction of a radical de-institutionalization of systems, which is true of media and religion as well (Seyfert 2011). Concerning the situation of religion, the diagnosis in respect of the relationship between religion and social media finds a multiplying effect. The de-institutionalization of religion will follow the speed and the conditions of the deinstitutionalization of social communication; the de-institutionalization process of religion (perhaps towards secular religions? cf. Manuel Jakab 2011) will increasingly de-institutionalize the internal communication. This means less authority control, less dogma, less jurisdiction, less obligation, but more authenticity, more

casuality, more individuality, more difference and diversity of concepts of faith (cf. Bauer 1980). On the one hand, this might facilitate the inter-faith dialogue. On the other hand, it might lead to assimilation on individual base, which could be assessed as a loss of cultural diversity and originality.

Following the interpretation of communication or communicative systems by the concept of “Symbolic Interaction” (Mead 1973), the change in communication is to be characterized as a process moving from a socialized use of codes towards a social use of codes. This means, communication changes from a habit performed in the interest of repeating and controlling culturally learned attitudes (i.e., the cultural rituals of mass-media).

Having brought things, hopes, and fears concerning social media to a balanced level of observation - far from demonization and also far from euphemism - now an in-depth-analysis should be done in order to get a clear picture of the communicative conditions of establishing interreligious dialogue within the context of social media.

The Communicative World of Religion

The world is a universe of diverse programs through which mankind tries to structure order, state meaning, and to direct perspectives of view and of distinction in relation to the experience of indeterminable contingency (Luhmann 1987: 203 - 207) and, also, of being confronted with a sense of uncertainty of what exists and what happens. The world comprises everything that is a cultural, symbolic, or gestural configuration (cf. Mead 1973) in relation to a mutually supposable perception of any event in a natural, social or cultural environment. The world is the construction of images and frames of connectivity that are negotiated through symbolic interaction in the interest of giving a reliable destination to anything that otherwise would be or would happen as the permanent repetition of surprise. On this note, communication is a socially-engaged cultural program of rationalization and of overcoming

any surprise and a program of reduction of complexity (cf. Luhmann 1973).

Within this world of symbolically generated and socialized environment, religion is a cultural program with a specifically directed interpretation of experience of uncertainty, which is based on special models of knowledge and concepts of sense, and is performing special signatures of the social and cultural practice from which it occurs. The social contexts of religion are the contexts of stories and discourses through which the society remains in flux. The social discourses mirror the stories of social and cultural change which, contemporarily, increasingly appear as media change. The myths and narrations of the agricultural and the subsequent industrial society are now to be replaced by those of a multi-optional and so-called open society (Popper 1992), which is appealed to be a knowledge-, information-, communication-, or media society. This shows that society is a social architecture based on narrations, history, stories and discourse (Schmidt 2003). In this context, communication is the matter of society. And religion, as a phenomenon of discursive connectivity, is an inherent moment of it. Alas, flexibility, elasticity, mobility, and changeability should not be just managerial soft skills for religious institutions and their representatives, but rather the intrinsic quality of their concepts of social self-realisation. Social change is not something that just occurs and society surprisingly becomes somehow aware of it. Social change is the concept of observation of the communication of society and of the society of communication (cf. Luhmann 1998). That is, society is interpreting itself as a cultural connection of a communicatively shared observation that is objectified in structures of symbols and rituals in the interest of exchangeability. In this context, religion becomes a factor in the social conceptualization of life; a system which is also configured through symbolic interaction (Mead 1973). Mankind interacts on the level of symbolically structured codes, whose usage it is learning through cultural socialization.

Conceptual Turns in Theorizing Communication and Media

A General Approach

The claim to refer credibly communication as the significant social model or paradigm of religions (especially the monotheistic ones) and, consequently, of theology, demands a clarification and declaration of which theoretical conception of communication is complex enough and sufficiently reasonable to correspond to the complexity of social reality insofar as it is a configuration of communication. Because of its quality of being a communicative configuration of the signification of experience, social reality becomes the relational focus of religion and in consequence of its theoretical reflection, namely theology. This is based on two assumptions:

- the concept of communication (i.e., the construction of reality through symbolic interaction - cf. Berger/Luckmann 1972) can be taken as the reasonable paradigmatic model *of* religion and *for* theology, and
- the determination of reality was what communication is thought to be competent (able, capable, responsible) for.

Conclusively, religion is a reality model as it is a symbolic-semantic unit of order that has been established through social-reflexive interrelations within mankind's communication (Schmidt 2003: 34). Consequently, theology is the observation of religion as a model of reality in the interest of its relevance for faith. In this context, theology becomes the knowledge building instance of observation of religiously relevant communication respective the religiously relevant reality. One-dimensional and unidirectional concepts of communication (sender-medium-receiver-effect-models) never match this cultural complexity. Therefore, they do not serve for more than the direct practice of communication. That is to say, they enforce the power of the sender (significantly falsifying called: communicator), especially in context of pastoral work.

Relating for a moment to the fact that religions need to be organized as institutions, makes putting the question in what concept of communication those institutions, or churches, might be interested. As a social organization, Church is one among other members of a system competing for attention. Since the Church has a message to be delivered and activities to be legitimized, it must use the ways of social practice of visibility, perception and acceptance. In a media-organized society, that means to use and claim the competence of media-like communication strategies. This interest of religious institutions, such as the Church, to become or to remain a powerful and influential factor in shaping out the order of society might lead them and as well their theological institutions to conceptualize communication (just) as a tool in consequence of those interests.

Since action is the paradigm of a concept of communication in a context of assessing interest of influence, the idea is to enforce all activities as the communication making ones; thus, taking communication for manipulative or instructive strategies of communicative presence within societal discourses.

In reality those concepts of communication that focus only on the relational event structures between sender and receiver and are interested in empowering the sender position to increase the effects on the receiver side cannot sufficiently frame the event of communication. Those concepts just stand for a concept of instruction. As long as the pastoral work (pastoral theology) reflects itself as the station to compensate the weaknesses of pastoral practice or of pastoral personnel through concepts of empowerment, and as long as such a theology has not understood what communication was and what communication was able (responsible) to create in respect of meaningful reality, the cultural upload of such, mostly structuralism and/or functionalism theories of communication is essentially zero. Because they exclude from their perspective all of what is in the cultural environment as this is something, which is not really a feature of the mechanical process itself. Because of that it is not relevant and not accessible for casual

steering. Such concepts of communication and/or media are by far too ontological, too narrow-minded and just interested in, from its environmental contexts, isolated objectification of communication or media structures. Moreover, such concepts are too normatively following the interests of industrial modernity; too much dedicated to models of simply mechanical plausibility; and too much affiliated to principles of mathematical or technical and economical formalization, as for example, causal models between input and output, reason and effect, or action and success (cf. Bauer 2010, Weber 2005). The mechanism of trust within those technically understood conceptualizations of communication just relates to the causal plausibility and controllability of technical rules and mechanically countable processes and programs. Such concepts cannot serve as reliable or comprehensive models of communication which respect the cultural complexity of religion as a matter of communication.

Theoretically, religious experience is a perspective of life within the social, cultural, and communicative conditions of the construction of reality and meaning. Moreover, religion is changing its structure according to social and cultural change. In this context, it seems to be important to be aware of the implications of the change of paradigms in theorizing reality, culture, communication, media, and religion. This is important because change touches upon the legitimacy of declaration and interpretation of religion as well as of theology, which are both contextualized within structures of communication. Compared to traditional concepts of communication and social interaction, which are mostly conceptualized as technical models of transmission and influence, two turns can be identified: the constructivist turn, and the cultural turn. These turns mean more than just a structural change. Because of their cultural affinity, they signify opening chances of theoretically conclusive interpretation of a mutually constitutive relationship between religion and communication. Both turns designate a qualitative change in conceptualizing perception as an intrinsic event of communication, and in interpreting the concept of communication as an event of cultural competence within structures of social practice.

The Value of Constructivist Turn

Constructivism as a philosophical perspective in explaining the possibilities of understanding reality is related to the question of how man is able to produce the meaning of experience, based on two assumptions:

- “mental models” are the key to understand (construct) reality, and
- those mental models are not just individually arbitrary inventions but culturally related (even controlled) frames for social (inter-individual) understanding.

The assumption that there is an external objective reality to be observed as the same and as the one for anyone has misled to dogmatic positions. On the one hand, it has opened up causal-theoretical cosmologies (cf. Bauer 1980). In the course of philosophical conceptual relativity of an objective reality and of increasing epistemological knowledge on non-dualistic conceptualization of reality (cf. Mitterer 2001, Schmidt 2003: 92 f., Weber 2005), the fictional character has become clearer and successively accepted as a basis for an open horizon of explanation of the autonomous status of man facing the contingency of explaining the reality, thus unrevealing mysteries (cf. Kuhn 1976: 49 f.). Since each enlightenment starts with scepticism (Descartes), mankind is challenged to learn through exchanging the peradventure to agree on a signification that unifies the diversity of observation into a common concept of reality.

There are mainly two schools of the constructivist discourse. The naturalist scientific school of thought argues with neuro-physiological hypotheses, which claim that one can only take as a reality, what s/he is able to observe through wits. The limits of the world are defined by the limits of sensual observation (cf. Maturana / Varela 1984). The more recent cultural school of thought conceptualizes reality as a result of communicative practice within a cultural program (cf. Mitterer 2001,

Schmidt 2003: 38). As an alternative option to essentialist concepts of perception, the constructivist interpretation hypothesizes that perception makes all the difference. Because of that it needs to be shared in the way of communication. It, therefore, does not depict reality thought to exist for any observation to be the same. Rather, it constructs reality as an agreeable issue of relevance. The constructivist position, which observes and interprets reality as a way of construction becoming real because relevance...

- says reality is (not what, but) *how* we observe the natural, social, cultural and symbolic environment. Observing reality scientifically (analyzing society, culture, communication, media etc.) then means to decide for a second order (perspective) of observing the observation, which we use to define the relevance (= culture as a complex of meaning).
- makes a normative epistemological inclusion: observing a culture (of society, communication, media, etc.) always challenges the culture of observation, which is contextualized through the social, cultural, symbolic environment we are living with and through which we learned the attitudes of observation.
- understands theory as an open-source model (a model *of* interpretation and *for* interpretation) and as a methodological interruption (break) of everyday routines of observation (cf. Schmidt 2003: 89), saying *how* are we observing and *why* are we observing as we are observing?
- conceptualizes truth at this level of and in the context of observation not as a dimension (criterion) of content, but a quality (criterion) of morality of social practice (transparency, responsibility, competence). In this constructionist concept, the carrier of truth is the actor respective to the symbolic interaction program among actors. This has to be taken as a critical alienation to normative concepts of truth, where the content (message) is supposed to be the carrier (responsible reference) of truth. Even the consensus-theory delivered by Jürgen Habermas (1973), which is still considered as one of the most comprehensive conceptualization

of truth within the context of social theories, did not (or could not) go so far.

Understanding Culture as a Matter of Communication

Culture is the most relevant environment to religion. For a long time culture was objectified as a set of aesthetical performance and behaviour related to education, reflection, and ethical orientations. The Cultural Studies, based on the theoretical conception and research of the Birmingham School in the 1950s, (cf. Simon, etc.) contextualized the analysis of cultural expression with conditions of everyday life (social environment). Therefore, this school of thought came up with a very broad and contextual definition of culture as “a whole way of life” (Williams 1971: 16). Using this concept as theoretical framework in describing the cultural structure of religion leads to a contextual analysis of religion. It conceives religion as a way of directing the execution of personal life under condition of sociability towards a concept of intrinsic sense, which heavily conceptualizes God as a source of relevance for the execution of life under condition of society. The consequences of this theoretical paradigm have been wide ranging:

- There is no “naturally logical” necessity in making a difference between high and low culture. Popular culture is culture as advanced culture claims to be culture. Applied to the analysis of religion as a cultural expression, religious culture cannot credibly claim a special dignity of owning a privileged position compared to other systems of belief.
- In the context of religion’s historical programs, especially the Christian one has occupied a hegemonic position which directs and frames social and individual life. It is the interest of Cultural Studies to analyse culture as a factor of power and domination and to generate interpretative systems of social life oriented on the conditions of equal rights.
- The contextual structure of culture (and here as well of religion) is a result of the critical paradigm of observation and demands

a contextual analysis (here: of theology) in the interest of an intervening theory as a challenge for change. This makes (contextual) theology a source of concepts for cultural change.

- Observing culture always means to objectify the social context in the interest of explication of sense; and to find a metaphor for that in order to exchange it or to bring it into the system of social exchange.
- The idea of cultural studies of religion is not to find a generalized normative definition of religion. Rather, it is to describe empirically and critically *how* society discovers and invents the cultural meaning of its existence, knowing that the observation of culture is not the observation of a (historical, social) territorial but the critical observation of interests of territorialisation.

Understanding Communication as a Matter of Sociability

It is important to dissociate the concept of communication from its technical and instrumental interpretation, that is, understanding communication as a tool of or for influence, power, or exchange of whatever. Communication is a concept that describes the experience of the sociability of man. It assumes that there is an intrinsic and inherent meaning; namely that of coming together or of togetherness as the intrinsic meaningful definition of sociability. The instrumental interpretation of communication follows a pragmatic plausibility of technical processes. Moreover, it metaphorizes the experience of functionality as an agreement on social order within the struggle of interests in the process of negotiating a meaningful agreement. As an alternative to the concept of cultural communication, three observations may be offered:

- *The observation of human existence (anthropological perspective).* This observation is derived from the pre-philosophical notion that the contingency of human existence might somehow be the undefined destination of mankind. Communication is the social practice to ascertain the indefinite, to define reality as a point of

- reference for social co-orientation, and to decide for relevance (and signification of relevance) of a multi-optional observation.
- *The observation of contingency of experience (cognitive theory / knowledge theory perspective).* Contingency is the experience of man that reality never is one but optionally different. In need of and in order to fulfill the sense of sociability of individual life, we observe ourselves through models of unification of difference, which is a way of communicating the observation (different views). In relation to different unification this makes sense (knowledge or believe). If experiences would be the same, it would be only one. So communication is the social method of defining things (relevance) by and through difference. What makes sense is difference (sic: This is quite different from the way we use communication in our organized society; namely, as a means of reducing and excluding difference.) Speaking the truth then is what does not state another (different) view as true.
 - *The observation of sociability of reality (relevance).* This observation denotes the experience of man that nothing has relevance, if it is not brought into the exchange of mutually expected trust. We observe communication as the social practice of exchanging sociability (trust, responsibility, interdependence).

When employing descriptions (interpretative definitions) like that as a model of communication, the analysis comes much nearer to what is or could be the communicative sense of religion; or what is or could be the religious potential of communication.

Understanding Mediality as a Cultural Dispositive

As societies become more and more organized, interconnected, and interrelated by politics, by economy, by social and cultural affairs (i.e., migration, globalization, etc.), social communication increasingly occurs in the media or rather, not in the media but ever more so in a medial environment. This medial environment is increasingly codified through news, stories, narrations, and discourses, or uploaded

through multi-optionality, anywhere mediatized through technology and anyhow medialized through diverse cultural codes. In such an environment, understanding the world means understanding media. The media system explains itself by itself and out of itself. This means, nothing can be observed outside of media: “all, what we know about the world we are living with, we know through mass media” (Luhmann 2004: 9). Increasingly, everything we know we know because of being interconnected with and within stories and discourses all around the world.

That is somehow the desperate position of modernity. But being aware of that, the solution is clear (at least theoretically). There is a need of changing the perspective of observation of structures: from a unique media ontology (the press, radio, television, the Internet as “a” media”) to a contextual observation of cultures of media usage. The issue here is not media as a structural item, but mediality as a cultural quality of societal communication. Due to the double plural of the term (the media) used within everyday practice as well as in scientific theories and due to special media ontologies (Leschke 2007: 245), the view to what the *medium* (not just media) culturally means, has been pushed into the background. Media becomes a *medium* in context of use (cf. Hepp 2008:66, Krotz 2008:48, Innis 1951). It becomes a dispositive (Foucault) of mediality which contextualizes the symbolic, cultural and social environment. Moreover, it becomes a reference of possibility, change and challenge of mutual social understanding. The symbolic interaction increasingly refers to a cultural program (“mediality”) that has been developed by itself (*autopoiesis*). Thus, the interaction program continuously is being replaced by itself; that is, maintaining itself through change by itself.

What does that mean to religion as a cultural program in the context of communication? It means that the media does not change religion, but religion – conceived as the matrix of sense – is changing in and through its symbolically generated medial substance. This statement is based on the following assumptions:

- communication is not a tool of/for religion but the model in which it occurs, and
- the media is not a tool for (the distribution) of religion but the cultural environment (mediality) where it occurs (cf. Luhmann 1974).

It does not make any sense to understand the worlds of belief and knowledge as being dependent on the media. It is not a question of a unique media ontology to get connected to the world. It is a question of mediality as a cultural quality of constructing meaning and sense. In that environment of medial interchange, discourse religion as well is a medial phenomenon; or rather it should be understood and analyzed as a phenomenon of mediality and as a matter of media culture. The structuralist view never can explain sufficiently the relation of religion and media as a phenomenon of modern society. However, the culturalist perspective of analysis can give insight into the interconnectivity of religion and media culture as a post-modern society phenomenon. Religion in a post-modern view of society appears as a communication phenomenon that is confronted with its own deconstruction as any other cultural system of archiving the cultural mind. This does not mean the end of religion. Rather, it points towards a new perspective of religion as a matrix of constructing sense. The difference is noticeable:

- The structuralist view is looking for structural characters in the interest of defining the function of media (functionalist perspective); that is, defining media as a “tool of” or a “tool for” something. This view conceives the media as a tool of communication and understands religion as a (an institutional) tool for (a specified) communication as well.
- The culturalist view is observing the social and cultural meaning of media-related communication in the interest of understanding the (social, organizational, technological, cultural) environment of communication; that is, observing the mediality of communication as a quality of constructing, society, culture and/or religion. This

view is not interested in the media-structured situation of society or religion (as an institution) but in the medium-constituted (and religiously relevant) self-reflection of the society.

- Mediality is the mental, social, cultural, symbolic dispositive environment of communication. We observe communication as a quality of mediality as we observe media in relation to the perspectives of observing communication (sense, difference, sociability).

Understanding Religion as a Cultural Matrix in Contexts of Social Communication

As a model of knowledge (sharing observation and focusing the interpretation of sense to a concept of God) and culture (sharing the orientation of life to that concept of God) realized within social frames (order of distribution of sociability), religion represents the potential of a system (as a mechanism of mutual trust the controlling instance of observation of communication) and develops structures in order to remain as a socially perceptible configuration. It thus overcomes and outlives limits of time, space, and interaction. Faith, which is understood as the communicative dispositive of grand narrations on grand cultural concepts of truth, love, freedom, divinity, and eternal life, mutates into systems of belief or even systems of knowledge of belief within the context of social structures. On that note, knowledge building an interpretative analysis which observes the social and cultural conditions (contexts) of religious practice falls within the domain of theology as a system of knowledge of belief. Within this theoretical framework, the task of practical theology is not to modify the concept of God but to modify the meaning of the concept of God in everyday social life.

Of course, religion needs a social structure (group building, community building, organisation, institution) as it is a symbolically generated contextual model of construction of signification and, as such, a generalized model of designation as a source of mindful meaning. On this note, any socially interested theory related to religion (observing

religious practice) must turn out as a theory that explains religion in categories of communication as a cultural matrix of constructing sense. Connected through structures of exchanging and sharing meaning, any religion gets socially constituted as a community of mutually supposed fiction of the same faith. It provides a notion (knowledge model) of God and a concept of what that means for the execution of life in the framework of such a community. In order to clarify the relevance of communication within the cultural programming of religion, as well as, to understand the relevance of religion in the context of social execution of life, it might be helpful figure out some interpretative positions:

- Religion is a cultural matrix of constructing sense and meaning. It is a model of reference for the assessment of contingency. In this respect, it is a complex of cultural signification that is constituted by the communication of faith (as a habit) and belief (as a model of knowledge).
- Religion is the radical answer to the experience of radical *aporia* in the social model of exchange of interpretation (dialogue and discourse – cf. Flusser 1998). It seeks to overcome the destination of human existence, yet is being undefined through potential attribution of definition through communication.
- Religion is a system that differs from its social, political or everyday life environment through its special operation (i.e., communication in relation to that what people/members might believe), although it intervenes with other systems because of its overall horizon of constructing meaning.
- Based on these notions, it becomes evident that religion represents a model of connectivity of meaning that can only be realized as a communicative operation. And, as such, it always intends to express itself by means of community; thus, sharing and distributing the sociability of individual life.
- Religion is the inspiration of what sociability means in realizing one's individual life, always in responsibility to social meaning (faith). This is why religion counts as the frame of reference for morality and this, in turn, is why religions refer to (or come from)

grand narrations.

Creating Media Religion

Trying to extend this interpretation of religion out of its communicative context to a media context and to a medialized social environment as described before, there is a concrete need of interpreting religion as a media phenomenon. Referring to the media typical effects, as mentioned in any critical analysis of medialized culture of communications (e.g., standardisation, trivialization, reduction of complexity, sensationalism, simulation, fiction, imaging, news attention, entertainment, etc. cf. Postman 1988), it is generally assumed that the substance of religion (as a radical communicative destination facing the indefiniteness of human existence) changes its consistence into a model of media conversation in the manner of simulation, sensationalism, entertainment, standardisation, news attention, etc. Such an effect must not be seen as loss of religion but rather as a social and cultural change of religion. Within medialized structures of communication and in respect to what was called the mediality of communication, the phenomenon of religion might change into what is conceptualized as spirituality.

Spirituality differs from religion. It is build around another paradigm of meaning construction and sense-orientation; that is, belief. While religion is a system and a frame of reference for the sociability of life (ethically, aesthetically and ritually), spirituality is a frame of connectivity and the frame of reference for individual inspiration of life. Spirituality is an individual decision of using (any) framework of constructing a transcendent sense of personal life. The individual uses a system of belief in order to define its status of orientation. Spirituality does not refer to the social and cultural controls through which religions try to territorialize their moral validity. The term spirituality has been used for the description of theological traditions in religious congregations. Recently, it has gained attention and has been used to describe personal religious experience.

Watching the media's contribution to the religious discourse, directs attention to the fact that religion in a competitive environment for media attention among numerous other topics has become a matter of satisfying conversational curiosity. When accepting the condition that the global society is constituting itself in a model (as a model) of mediality (codes of attention and attraction, dissipatedness, coincidence of concernment, presumption of interests of generalized others, conversational character, etc.), it becomes evident that religion as a communicational institution, which connects believers now under condition of media change, will also change its cultural face. The recognition (is it religion, spirituality or philosophy?) depends on the character of communication and/or medial use.

Observation of Change –the Competence Motif of Communication

The world of reality is a world of denotations. Anything that is supposed to exist only can become true (real) by and through denoting observation. All socially and culturally relevant denotations arise from social negotiation and agreement of observation within the context of communication, which can be taken as the definitive metaphor for the social practice of unification of observational difference as well as the social practice of the distribution of the sociability of experience and observation (Bauer 2011b: 60). As an observation, communication is changeable. And as communication, observation is changing just as the world of reality is changing within historical contexts. Reality is the reality of observation. If we can accept this constructivist theoretical notion (Glaserfeld 1996, cf. Schmidt 2003), then the construction of reality has to be measured as a question of observational quality and competence. Based on this argument, reality (matter) of religion is a cultural configuration of denotation, which is kept and remains in contexts of communication – in its quality also depending from competence.

Communication competence (related here to categories of ability, capacity, responsibility, authenticity – cf. Baacke 1973, 1997, Bauer

200: 56 f.) is not a concept of personal habit. In the context of systemic interpretation, it is rather conceived as a cultural good or as an intrinsic cultural motif of mutual social understanding, always related to the diversity of cultural environments. Competence, interpreted as an ethical concept of communication, is a relevant dimension of communication. Competence is also relevant as an ethical component of the cultural usage of religion, which is a communicative configuration in the interest of transcendent denotations of life. It might be a result of the process of secularization (which is by itself a concept of social change – cf. Taylor 2002) that the historical society successively becomes more and more aware of itself and of its intrinsic competencies. This means, the society learns to take care of itself as a matter of self-responsibility for its cultural and moral standards. The contexts of religion are also the contexts of theology, since it was thought to be the theoretical conceptualization of what is and means religion in context of social life. Since the contexts, especially the social ones of religion are changing, the concepts of theology are in need of change, or, as argued previously, social change. Change as the cultural concept of society is becoming a theological concept of theorizing religion as a matter of social life. In the context of such an interpretation, change is not something that happens, but change is the principle that makes things happening – in theory as an abstraction of practice; and in practice as the source of theory.

In such an epistemologically open environment of the interpretability of the relationship between religion, society and change, the two worlds of theoretical interpretation may fall into one. The one consists of society, culture and communication. The other one, the theoretical interpretation of religion, is conceived as the communicative environment of a cultural interpretation of the meaning of the concept of God in social context of life. Both, however, mutually stand for each other as a dispositive of observation (cf. Schmidt 2003): communication as a concept of critical observation of religion; religion as a concept of critical observation of communication. In such a constellation, the objective subject of interpretation then becomes the

(way of) interpretation of the subject. The methodological aim is to create a dialectic model of a hermeneutical circle. The competence of it is to turn the linear imagination of any development in a circular one. The metaphor of a circle interprets a process that is not causal and not final (where what would start or end and what was the direction of causality). It is a trans-effective movement in enriching and enlarging the knowledge of whatever is the subject to come clear. The dialectic-methodological enmeshment should pay attention only to the notion that any theory (diction) has found its legitimacy of interpretation, when it is proved by other (contradiction) views or concepts.

It should be stated clearly that such a dialectic model of a hermeneutical circle as a methodological principle of theology is not just a rhetorical model of a theological wording of or for religious mysteries (God). It is simply the methodological paradigm of a theoretically credible reconstruction of the daily religious discourse in the framework of a theoretical conceptualization for a theoretical model of wording of God. Such a theoretical re-programming of theological claims of explaining religion as a matter of life epistemologically, only becomes credible as a contextual work in progress. Reconstructive hermeneutics is the methodological environment for any method of objectification of religiously meant discourse. It could be done, for instance, in a way of a reflexive critical discourse analysis (cf. Jäger 1993).

The Sense of Diversity and the Fight for Unity

Religion, considered and understood through a concept of communication, appears as a specific culturally differentiated configuration of communicative acting in order to construct the meaning of reality. As such, it pretends to focus on observing the experience of mankind being in intrinsic and existential need of interpreting a concept of God. In such a degree as God is a religious code that unlocks the mystery of sense, it is in the final analysis a communicative construction. This code is then a cultural instance with a comprehensive demand of truth that makes any religion being the communicational environment (more

or less institutional mediality) of belief. The decision of belongingness is socially born out as a decision for a concept of belief and is finally for anyone more or less a coming out for an identifiable concept of life. As far as the concept of belief concerns One-God-religions understanding God as the acting and causing principle in creation of the world, as well as, the first and last principle giving sense to whatever happens to and in this world, it might be explainable that this vertical interpretation of a transcendent world of order becomes a cultural paradigm of and for the hierarchical order of communication within the social body of the religion. It must not be like that.

Considering communication – beyond and before all practical applications of notions of social order – as a concept of distinctive observation of whatever is the environment of everyday social practice, the cognition could accrue that the order of the world not only would arise through acceptance of concepts of already reduced complexity (hierarchical verticality of communication through a given world of order), but also through self-responsible creation of complexity (heterarchical horizontality of communication). Whereas a hierarchical concept of communication is interested in unity and uniqueness of truth, a heterarchical concept of communication is interested in multi-option and diversity of what becomes true. In any way, the question of identity and recognition of identity remains as a challenge of self-awareness and self-presentation for any religion under condition of being structured as a social body.

As any individual, any community or any society, religion as an distinguishable socially and culturally connective body is in need of identity, assuming that identity is the cultural concept of becoming aware of the social environment and the symbolic instance of making oneself being considered by others. Identity differentiates a subject from its environment. In the interpretation of the Symbolic interaction theory (Mead 1973, Blumer 1973), it is a typological abstraction of characters and a conceptual configuration of and for observation, generated through interaction and for communication in order to distinguish any subject

from any other one. Identity is a concept of taking notice of anyone and anything in relation to oneself. Moreover, it is a control instance of observing the natural, social, cultural and symbolic environment. It, thus, objectifies environmental information as a specified subject defined through its characters and determined to mean somehow the same (*idem*) as with any other observation of a generalized other, and becoming aware of those characters.

What characters become significant for a cultural concept of identity or identification of a person, of an organisation, of a community, or of a society finally is a question of the cultural program of mental, rational or moral distinction. Beyond this mechanism of distribution of sociability (Bauer 2010), there is no chance for a socially relevant or self-aware existence. As it is important for any social body to get along with this mechanism, it is a crucial point to perform such identifiable codes of signification through communication.

Yet the social contexts of living, generating and providing such codes are heavily changing, not only because of, but especially in connection with the current migration movement. With them the social frameworks of identity building of persons, groups, organisations, or of cultures have come into severe imposition. Following the political and public debates on religion as a base of national cultures and of social rituals, one could get the impression that there is a mutually supporting relation of legitimacy between culture and religion. Institutions on both sides (i.e., religion and public culture) seem to draw a benefit from that interchanging relationship. It is a noticeable phenomenon that three large One-God-confessions (the Christians, the Muslims, and the Jews) base themselves on an authority of cultural traditions, social rituals, and mental programs; especially when it comes to conflicts or to any other situation, when religious institutions feel challenged to hold their stakes in public life. It is also a remarkable phenomenon that cultural traditions, often specified as national culture, invoke religion as a source of cultural or even national cultural identity.

The Recognizability of Religion in Postmodern Environments

It is a remarkable phenomenon, maybe owing to postmodern cultures of society, that religion is having a comeback after the industrial society (concept of modernity, age of enlightenment). However, religion is not coming back in the form of church or as an institution, but rather as a civil movement or even as a secular movement; that is, as a new moral concept of a secular sociability. Asking within the analysis of social change: What is it, what brings religion back to the societal discourse and, at same time, marginalizes their traditional institutions?

Religion, understood as a complex of communication (constructing of sense and meaning) is the communicative (social) context that becomes relevant in respect to the radical experiences of life and of realizing life. Religion now is socially recognized as an open structured (not merely institutional) communication complex that provides symbols and codes for the need of mankind to get along with transcendent components of interpreting individual life. Whereas before, religion was a system organized as a church, which limited the universal scope of contingency to a decision of faith and belief. Perhaps, it helps to construct a distinction between belief and faith in relation to their communicative impact. The distinction refers to a more institutional and less intrinsic or less institutional and more intrinsic model of construction of the validity of sense.

In such a distinction, belief, a term that is closer to prescription, represents the concept of acceptance for constructions of limitation of contingency. Thus, belief represents the communicative habit assimilated to a system. Faith, in contrast, represents the concept of what is or could be the construction of knowledge that represents the habit of acceptance of an illimitable complexity and open contingency as the model of surprise of meaning. Religion is the symbolic framework for both communicative habits. It is a cultural and social system of translation. It translates the experience of transcendent indications of life into spiritual attitudes towards the psychic, moral and practical

challenges of life. Those habits, attitudes and constructions connect morally to exceptional situations and passages of life (birth, illness, death, good luck, wedding, tragedies and catastrophes), to meaningful periods in social life (childhood, youth, age), and translate the undefined world into a definable and agreeable reality (cf. Luhmann 1968, Schütz/Luckmann 1984, Flusser 1998, Bauer 2011: 466). Such constructions need a medium/media in order to make the idea visible and tangible (cf. Kierkegaard: language as the media of the idea). This search for a visible and tangible religion as the symbolic environment of translation is permanently challenged to change its structures of communication, based on the fact that the cultural legitimacy and social acceptance of religion are depending on its communication concepts. Relating this line of thought to the increasing aesthetization of social communication through a technologically designed mediality, there is also the possibility of a theoretical option and a challenge of shifting from an ontological and structural observation of a religion ("the religion" as an institution) to religion as a concept of an especially medialized (programmed) observation of meaning. It is not that the religiously ritualized social habit that constitutes religion in mode of communication (institution), but it is the intrinsic communicative motif that makes any symbolically (medialized) generated matrix of sense understood as an option of religion.

Finally summing up the argumentation so far and reminding of the notion that communication is what we know about it and religion is what we think about it, the relationship of religion and communication can be described as mutually enabling concepts of sense. As they are different in terms of constructive aesthetics but similar in terms of construction of ethics, they compliment one another and mediate to one another through the whole cultural program of human beings, like one lane next to the other, thus forming a guide rail throughout the history of individuals and societies. Both are concepts exploring, explaining and designing the options of being and becoming human within a community or society. Both insinuate that man is competent (able, capable and responsible –cf. Bauer 2011: 526) for the construction of reality and

sense. Sense in that context relates to three levels of construction of meaning: ethic, aesthetic and benefit (cf. Edmair 1968: 63). In such a degree, religion then is the ritually cultural practice of any sense-related social communication. Communication is the socially cultural practice of any social religion as a cultural, symbolic or ritual event of the construction of sense – ethically, aesthetically and practically.

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**JESUS CHRIST AS COMMUNICATOR:
A Biblical Perspective**
Lucien Legrand, mep

If we look in the Bible for a model of communication, the image of Paul, the “great apostle,” evangelizer, preacher and writer, might come first to the mind. If we are particularly concerned with the spirituality of communication, it is again Paul who may hold our interest since his letters often turn into an exposition of what drives him on, the power of the Good News, “power of God for salvation of every one who believes” (Rom 1:16). But Paul himself invites us to look beyond him. He does not want to know anything but Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). He puts above everything “the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus (the) Lord... to know him and the power of his Resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings” (Phil 3:8.10).

In a particularly revealing verse he opens for us the heart of his message, of his ministry and of his life: “the love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14). The “love of Christ” should be properly understood. In view of the context, Paul does not speak of the love he has for Christ but of the love that Christ has and embodies, the love that made him to give his life for all. That love motivated Christ and, through the gift of the Spirit, it has taken possession of Paul. It is that divine love abiding in Christ which has Paul in its grip and drives him on his way.

Following his invitation, we better go therefore to the heart of Paul, to Christ as the vital source of the power of communication. For the sake of clarity and of comprehensiveness, we may follow a classical approach to the mystery of Christ and look at him as communicator from the viewpoint of what theologians call High and Low Christology, or, too put it in simpler terms, in terms of Christ, the Word, sum total

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of communication, issuing from the Trinity, and of Jesus, the Galilean from Nazareth, who proclaimed the Message in words and deeds, life and death.

Part I. Christ the Word and Communication

“High Christology” or “Christology from above” approaches Christ from a Trinitarian perspective. This is what John does when, in the Prologue of his Gospel, he introduces Christ as *Logos* (Word) coming forth from God (1:1-14). The perspective is interesting since the *Logos* refers evidently to language and language is communication.. From this angle, it can be said that Christ, the *logos* is the archetype of communication. To follow this line we can have no better guide than the meditation of Pope Benedict XVI on Jn 1 in the beginning of the Pastoral Exhortation *Verbum Domini* in which he synthesized the input of the 2008 Synod on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*.¹

I . The God who speaks

The title given to the first part of the Exhortation is significant: “The God who speaks.” Unlike religions which relate with the divine through visual experience, either physical (statues, paintings) or intellectual (Greek *theoria*, hindu *darshana*), the biblical God is “truly a hidden God” (Is 45:15; cf Is 8:17). The Bible in general puts a particular emphasis on the impossibility of seeing God. The invisible God manifests himself rather by his Word. Such is the case for instance of God’s manifestation to Moses in the desert (Ex 3) and to Israel on Sinai (Ex 34). Typically the Holy of Holies of the desert Tabernacle or of the Jerusalem Temple did not contain a divine image but the tables of the Law, the Ten Words (Ex 25:16; 40:20). In the narratives of prophetic vocation also, the divine description is minimized (Is 6:1: “the edge of his garment”); relativized (Ez 1:26: “the appearance of the similitude”) or totally absent (Jer 1:4; Is 40:1). Communication with God is through his Word. John the evangelist has put it in a terse way:

“God no one has seen; the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (Jn 1:18). As St Paul says: “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). But how does God speak to us? Echoing the *Instrumentum Laboris*, and following the lead of Jn 1, the Holy Father speaks of a “symphony of the Word,” of a “polyphonic hymn” (VD 7).

1. Voice of creation: “All things came into being through him and without him nothing came to be” (Jn 1:3). “The *liber naturae* is an essential part of the symphony of many voices in which the one Word is spoken” (VD 7). Cf Ps 19:1-4:

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their voice has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world.”

The climax of creation is the human being, climax of Creation through “the precious gifts received from the Creator: the value of the body, the gift of reason, freedom of conscience”, the ability to find and abide by the natural law (VD 9).

2. Voice of salvation history: “he came into his own but his own received him not” (Jn 1:10-11): “It is beautiful to see how the entire OT already appears to us as a history in which God communicates his word... He revealed himself in words and deeds as the one living and true God.” A rapid survey of the Old Testament outlines the main stages of the history through which God communicates his word in the promises made to Abraham, the covenant given through Moses, and the ongoing voice of the prophets (VD 11). Pope John Paul II gives universal perspectives to salvation history when he says: “The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history,

peoples, cultures and religions.”²

3. *Voice of Incarnation*: God’s self manifestation in his Word reaches a climax when the Word becomes flesh (Jn 1:14). It is a “Christology of the Word” which the Pope presents in a poetical way:

In this symphony (of the Word), “one finds at a certain point, what could be called in musical terms a ‘solo,’ a theme entrusted to a single instrument or voice which is so important that the meaning of the entire work depends on it. This ‘solo’ is Jesus. The Son of Man recapitulates in himself earth and heaven, creation and the Creator, flesh and Spirit. He is the centre of cosmos and of history (VD 13).

4. *Voice of the Scriptures* The voice of God in the Scriptures is to be viewed in this context. They relay the “words” of Christ, prepared by the Prophets and witnessed by the apostolic Church in written form under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As the Fathers of the Church have put it, the Scriptures represent a kind of Incarnation in which the Word became book in the Scriptures as it became flesh in Jesus-Christ (VD 18). Pope Benedict illustrates this with a quotation of St Gregory:

*The body of the Son is the Scripture which we have received... The words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech, just as the word of the eternal Father, when he took upon himself the weak flesh of human beings, became like them.*³

5. *Voice of Church*: A christology of the Word opens on a ecclesiology of the Word: “This is due to the fact that God’s self-communication always involves the relationship of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, whom Irenaeus of Lyon refers to as ‘the two hands of the Father’” (15). The Spirit who inspires the Sacred Scriptures continues to guide

the believer and the Church in their interpretation. In this connection the Document of the Biblical Commission on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* recalls the words of Jesus:

The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name-- he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you” (Jn 14:26) and again,¹² “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. ¹³ But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming” (Jn 16:12-13).⁴

Through the Spirit, the living tradition of the Church “enables the Church to grow through time in understanding the truth revealed in the Scriptures” (VD 17).

II. Reflections

This Theology of the Word may lead to a few pastoral reflections on Communication.

1. Communication as expression of divine Logos

Viewed in this perspective, Communication does not belong to the secondary field of “practical applications,” of mere techniques or savoir-faire. Communication means sharing the Word. It is “Word”, *logos*, a term which is rich in philosophical and theological implications.

As human language, the *logos is* no mere abstract principle of intelligibility in the Platonic sense of the term.⁵ As authentic language, it is the mould in which is cast and shaped what human beings express have in their minds, hearts and will. It carries and brings into existence their visions and creations, relate to each other in joy, sorrow, aspirations, and purposes. *Logos* is language of which Heidegger said that “it is the

house of Being.”⁶

The Bible puts it in simple terms. In the Garden of Eden, Adam is surrounded by animals as one among them. But there is a difference: Adam can give them a name. At His own image and likeness, God has given him his *logos*. He has entrusted Adam with language, with a capacity to name, understand, to put things in order and thereby to control and to exercise a creative management: “See, I give you every plant... and the animals... Have dominion over... them (Gen 2:19; 1:28-29). It is highly significant that, to reveal His identity and interact with the human being He had created, the God of Israel and of Jesus-Christ chose this *logos*, the medium of creative activity and relational partnership.⁷ “God created humankind in his own image. In the image of God he created them” (Gen 1:27). When Jn 1 refers to the “beginning” in terms of *logos*, it means that the image and likeness of God consists in the creative and communicative power of language, endowed with authority.

From the same biblical perspective (which is the viewpoint of the Johannine Prologue), the divine *logos* (or Hebrew *Dabhar*) is the manifestation of the all-embracing and almighty divine will and plan as it unfolds in salvation history, through the mighty deeds of God in favour of his people as well as through the words of the Promise, of the Covenant, and of the challenge of the Prophets.⁸ Salvation history, with its cosmic and world dimensions, is all along a story of mighty and loving divine *logos*, of effective *dabhar*, in short of communication endowed with power.

Christ the new Adam, is the ultimate expression of this divine image and likeness. He is divine language of divine self-communication because he is the Son who “knows the Father” (Jn 1:18; Mt 11:27). Through words and deeds, options and death, he embodies the language that makes the Father known. His words are divine language. He is the enfleshed divine language of power and love.

2. *Dignity and Responsibility of communication*

Whether it is in oral, visual or auditive form, Communication is language, *logos*. Therefore it participates of the dignity and responsibility of human and divine language.

It shares in the dignity of human language: beyond its technical aspects it emanates from and appeals to the deepest level of human identity and potentiality. It shares in the responsibility of language: it should be authentic language, and not mere babble. It should not be mepty cant but “poetic” in the etymological sense of the term (Greek *poiain*: to make), creator of meaning and thrust. It should be iconic and not made of stereotyped clichés, evoking the mysterious depth of being. It should be dynamic and not lifeless, opening new visions and new challenges and not falling back on worn out repetitive emptiness. In short, it should be the opposite of the tepid broth which is poured out week after week from our pulpits on a hapless laity.

Christian communication shares in the dignity and responsibility of the divine *logos*. It is part and parcel of the mystery of a God who speaks, who, while “hiding his face,” makes Himself known in the polyphony of His Word.

3. *Authority and fidelity*

It shares in the authority of God’s Word: “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow (Heb 4:12); “it is a power of salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). It is the power of the initial *logos* of the God who said and it was done in Gen 1.

It entails also the responsibility of faithfulness: “We are ambassadors of Christ. It is God who appeals through us” (2 Cor 5:20). Our communication is called to be an authentic echo of the divine Word,

the genuine expression of the divine mystery. It has to resound with the voice of the One who said: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways... As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Jesus gave the ultimate principle of Christian communication when he said:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also...I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me” (John 5:19.30).

4. *In tune with nature and signs of times*

Like the *logos* finding expression in cosmos and history, Christian communication is in tune with what Benedict XVI calls the *liber naturae* (VD 7) and the signs of the times. Like Francis of Assisi, it sings the Canticle of Creatures along with Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brothers Wind and Air and Mother Earth, a song which is now amplified by modern astrological discoveries. Like the book of Revelation, it perceives the advent of the Lord in the cosmic and political upheavals. History seems to be a nonsensical release of obscure forces. But when the Lamb opens the seven seals, the voice is heard that says: “Behold, I am coming soon. ... I will give to each according to his deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:12-13).

This broad outlook rescues Christian communication from fundamentalist narrow Biblicism. A perception of God’s Word reduced to the letter of the Bible could easily turn into an idolatry of the letter, which would not be better than the idolatry of images. St Paul had already said: The letter brings death; the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). “Christian faith is not a religion of the book; Christianity is a religion

of the Word, ‘not of a written and mute word, but of the Incarnate and living Word’” says Benedict XVI.⁹

5. *Biblical*

However, a one sided emphasis on the signs of the times and of nature, on life setting, as well as a defensive attitude towards the Protestant *Scriptura Sola* may have led the Catholics to a loss of knowledge and appreciation for the Bible, “word of God expressed in human words thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit” (VD 15). It is through the Scriptures that the story of God’s presence among us is communicated to us. Scriptures give the solidity of writing to this story to which we belong. “*Scripta manent*” as the saying goes and the seal of the Spirit is apposed on the solidity of the written record. Voice of the history to which we belong, the Scriptures constitute a kind of cultural environment, a mother tongue in which our faith is expressed. In this context, K. Rahner’s explanation of canonicity is interesting. The Scriptural Canon is no apodictic decision taken one day by a few Council Fathers gathered together. It is rather the outcome of the process in which the Church –and the people of Israel before that-, guided by the Spirit recognized the authenticity of their faith in such books and not in others.¹⁰ The Canon reflects the Spirit moved expression of a faith alive through centuries. It is the expression of a religious milieu to which we belong and which we imbibe. A Christian biblical language is part of our Christian identity as much as a mother tongue is part of our national makeup.¹¹ Christian communication has to enter this living tradition and foster it. Particularly Catholic communication has to contribute to restore the biblical culture which has been lost to some extent.

6. *Christ centered communication*

Mostly the Scriptures give witness to Jesus-Christ, the Word made flesh. Not only does he bring the Word like the prophets and the Apostles, but He is “the definitive Word which God speaks to humanity”

(VD 12). He is the key to the Christian language, the “‘solo’, theme entrusted to a single instrument or voice which is so important that the meaning of the entire work depends on it” (VD 13). No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known (Jn 1:18. “We have seen his glory” (Jn 1:14). The glory of the *logos* shines in the exalted Christ, where “at the heart of the ‘Christology of the Word’ ...we can contemplate the profound unity in Christ of creation, the new creation and salvation history” (VD 13). The divine *logos*, fully manifested in Christ, is no narrow sectarian exclusivist claim. It embraces all the dimensions of the cosmos and of history. To which it gives ultimate meaning as “it gathers up all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph 1:10).

For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col 1:16-17).

His “plenitude” is inhabited by “the breadth and length and height and depth” of the love of God (Eph 3:18). “To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:18-19) is at the heart of the Christian *logos*. St Paul puts in a terse formula: “To know Christ and the power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10).

Part II. Jesus of Nazareth as Communicator

Authentic language and therefore poetical and forceful, a genuine echo of the divine mystery, vibrating with the power of the Resurrection: such is the Christian *logos*, the qualities called for by Christian communication. A tall programme indeed. How can a human language meet these demands? A perfect example is given by the way Jesus of Nazareth went about proclaiming the Good News. This brings us to “lower Christology,” to a look at Jesus-Christ from below, from

the concrete setting of a Galilean villager, coming out of his obscure hamlet to spread the eschatological message of the Kingdom all round Galilee, the surrounding pagan territories of Decapolis, Tyre and Sidon and to the Jerusalem authorities.

I. Communicator of Good News

Jesus is eminently evangelizer, bearer of the Good News (Mk 1:14). He applies to himself the prophecy of Is 61:1-2: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives... to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4:18-19). “Never has anyone spoken like this!” will his listeners say (Jn 7:46). His departing words will be the Great Commission, the mandate given to the disciples to communicate to the whole world the message they have received (Mk 16:15), the message of peace (Jn 20:21), to be the witnesses of a life liberated by the Spirit (Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8). The Gospels are Good News: communication of the News is of the essence of what Jesus stood for.

II. Authentic language

He makes known his message through words and deeds, through his way of life and his options, through sacrifice and death.. He identifies totally with his revelation. This is concretely what John means when he says that Jesus is not only He who proclaims the Word but that He *is* the Word (Jn 1:14). There is no gap between what he says, what he does and what he is. He is totally authentic.

As seen in Jesus, the communication of the Gospel message rings true. Jesus’ language was powerful because it was genuine language, true to God and true to man.

1. *True to man*

Jesus’ language is *true to man* and not to man in abstract but to

concrete humanity represented by the common folk, the rural “marginal Jews,”¹² neglected by the Herodian administration and disdainfully called the ‘*Am ha’aretz*, the “people of the land,” by the Scribes. Jesus is true to this kind of humanity in the thirty years of humble life buried in the small unknown village of Nazareth. This rural belonging continues in the setting of his ministry which leaves aside the cities like Sephoris and Tiberias, enlarged and beautified in the Roman style by Herod Antipas. The option for the ‘*Am ha’aretz* appears also in the choice of his rather undistinguished disciples. He addresses the message of true happiness to the poor and his healing powers favour the marginalized, women, lepers, beggars, those whom sanctimonious opinion considered as sinners.

He is true to this option in the rural style of his language. He does not speak of God in the pompous rhetoric of a superficial godliness. God is not spoken of in terms of thrones, palaces, royal court and princely garments. Jesus’ God language is down to earth. Its symbolical range derives from the lowly range of rural activities: sowing, harvesting, shepherding, wages of daily workers, absentee landowners, women at the grinding stone and kneading the dough. It is actually a wonder that one could say God with the resources of such an ungodly linguistic material.

2. *True to God*

Jesus’ language is equally true *to God*. God of Jesus is the Father who is intimately close to his poor children. The humility and simplicity of the semantic range of his language evokes a God deeply involved in the occupations and concerns of the common folk, the woman treading the dough or missing her poor saving, the farmer anxious about the harvest, the fisherman hauling in a mixed catch. *The divine immanence* is expressed in terms which evoke the divine presence in the daily realities of human existence.

At the same time, through the language of humble daily reality,

Jesus does give a genuine expression to *God's transcendence* that upsets all human calculations and expectations. The transcendent God is always ahead of human projects and dreams. This divine transcendence is expressed by the unexpected turn taken by Jesus' stories.¹³ In this way, through the medium of ordinary daily life, Jesus is the true voice of an unpredictable God whose surpassing love prefers the sinner to the righteous, the wayward son to the honest but dourly elder son (Lk 15:11-32), whose extravagant preferences baffle standards of accountancy (Mt 20:1-15), whose patient might can face and overcome human failings without uproar and clamour (Mk 4:1-9), whose patience is infinite since it goes by the scale of eternity (Mk 4:26-29).

Parables are not moral lessons but the revelation of an unpredictable transcendent God whose ways are not our ways, whose thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55:8). "Once more astonished" is the title of an important book on the parables.¹⁴ It could be also the title given to the Sermon on the Mount with the surprising interpretations it gives to the biblical demands. The laborious interpreter of the Torah is left stunned by a radical hermeneutic that reverses the image of a God. The Almighty who was viewed as a stern account keeper of merits is now to be addressed as the Father whose infinite love transcends and upsets all human perceptions and expectations..

"Once more astonished" could be the title given to the revelation of a king-Messiah who is actually a Servant, to his proclamation that service is greatness (Mk 10:34-35), that the last are the first (Mk 9:35), that death is life (Mk 8:34). It is the entire scale of values that Jesus reverses. He does it because he is the Son who has access to the heart of the Father (Mt 11:25-27) and knows him as the great Lover who having given himself totally expects total surrender in return.

Jesus did not *speak* about God; he *reflected* a deep filial intimacy. His was powerful language because it was a language of authentic experience. Coming from the heart of a Son, Jesus' teachings are not theo-logy but theo-phany.

III. The Cross

This applies particularly to the theophany of the Cross. The Cross conveys the ultimate message of God's love for humanity. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). "Only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:7-8).

The message of the Cross is the most authentic language that can be used. It conveys the supreme way of being true to God and true to man. On the Cross, Jesus is true to man by a death which is most physically authentic. It does not even assume the nobility of Stoic indifference. Neither is it the gentle, self-controlled, philosophically analysed death of Socrates. Neither again is it Buddhist *nirvana* nor Jain *Samadhi*. Jesus' death is plain anguished torture. His last words are an agonising cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is not the language of literature or of pietistic pretence. It is the true distressed cry of all the victims of injustice and cruelty all over the world, all through the centuries.

True to God also is Jesus' Passion. He manifests his divine sonship by his total identification with the will of the Father. "Abba, Father... Not what I will but what you will" (Mk 14:36). The words of the prayer that Jesus had taught to the disciples are now written in flesh and blood. There cannot be more eloquent teaching. It is the most eloquent sermon of Jesus, the most meaningful parable of God's love, of life in death.

This is what St Paul called *ho logos tou staurou*, the language of the Cross (1 Cor 1:18), "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor 1:23-25). The Cross is folly because it

means love and love is folly. It is weakness because love is weakness: it makes one dependent of the other. But it is true wisdom and power because, without love there is no life, no meaning, no purpose. Love is the ultimate reality because “love is of God... God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

The preaching and the letters of Paul, a great communicator, do nothing but articulate this language of the Cross and of the Resurrection. It gave focus and force to his message. Christian communication cannot shirk the paradox of the crucified Messiah, or rather the mystery of the divine plan coming to fulfillment in unfathomable ways. As the book of Revelation puts it, the Lamb in a slaughtered status and yet standing in victory is the key to the Christian vision of history and of the world (Rev 5:1-8).

IV. Silence

In the Gospels of Mt and Mk, but for the last cry of distress, Jesus on the cross is silent. This silence has a deep significance. The most eloquent sermon of Jesus, the ultimate *logos* he bequeaths to humanity, is given in silence. Jesus communicates the Word not only through words and deeds but also through silence. Ultimately it is from the silence of the Cross and in the silence of the tomb that the message of God’s triumphant love is most forcefully proclaimed. On the Cross and through the Resurrection, the jubilant paschal message is proffered to the world without sound of word in its most radical form. Erected upon the world, the Cross of Golgotha silently proclaims God’s victorious love for the world. Challenging all forces of injustice, hatred, oppression and violence, its mute message resounds for ever: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16).

The value of silence is already noted in ordinary secular communication techniques. The use of pauses is a well known device in advertisement practice: they create an element of suspense which will serve to emphasize the commercial announcement. At a higher

level, times of silence are important elements of rhetorical, poetical and musical expression. They bring breathing space to the rhetorical, poetical or musical rhythm.

How much more is silence needed when communication deals with God language. The God who speaks is also the *silent God*. The theme of silence is frequent in the Bible especially in the Psalms. At times, God seems to remain silent (Ps 22:2; 28:1; 83:2; Hab 1:13) as if he wanted to be encountered in silence (Ps 4:5; 94:17; 121:2; Is 41:1). The God of the Bible communicates also in a negative way, by an apparent absence of communication, which is in fact an invitation *to go beyond any form of communication*. Ultimately what God has to reveal is his mystery, the ineffable realm which lies beyond any image and any formulation. Ignatius of Antioch speaks of Jesus-Christ, “the Word that proceeded from the eternal silence of God”¹⁵ He notes “the three resounding mysteries which were wrought in the silence of God... the virginity of Mary, her giving birth and the death of the Lord.”¹⁶ In the same vein, St John of the Cross says: “The Father has said only one Word and that Word is his Son. Now in an eternal silence, he is still saying it forever. The soul must hear it in silence.”¹⁷ A faith approach to communication shares in the experience of Elijah on Mount Horeb who heard the coming of the Lord not in storm, fire or earthquake but in “the sound of sheer silence” (1 Kgs 19:12).¹⁸ Ultimately faith communication is a matter of perceiving the voice of the Spirit, the echo of the Trinitarian divine language in and beyond the tumultuous expression of human expectations and anguish, joys and frustrations, triumph and agony.

Conclusion

Christian communication is also a matter of putting all the din of the media to the test of the divine Word and particularly of the divine silence of the Cross. It is the silence from which it emerges that gives force to communication. Ultimately true Communication should be pedagogy of silence. As Plutarch wrote long ago, “we learn speech

from men but silence from the gods,” or, in the words of Kirkegaard, in a more modern context,

The present condition of the world is diseased. If I were a doctor and asked for my advice, I should answer: Create silence, bring people to silence. The Word of God cannot be heard in the world today. If it is blazoned forth with all the panoply of noise so that it can be heard even in the midst of all other noise, then it is no longer the word of God. Therefore, create silence.

A faith approach to Communication is not just a matter of utilising modern media to spread the Gospel message. The message must ring true. Communication is effected through words, signs and symbols. But it is also to be accompanied with deeds and be the expression of an authenticity of life. In silence it will find its roots in the depths of the divine mystery and of the human soul.

END NOTES

- 1 Pope Benedict XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 30 Sept 2010, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010.
- 2 John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, 28.
- 3 *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 6,33; PL 15,1677, quoted in VD 18.
- 4 *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 1993, Part III, B.
- 5 As taken by R. Panikkar in the sense of abstract thinking, opposed to *mythos* that would be “the matrix that bears the words.” Cf. *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, 344; *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, 1999, 37-39, 140-141.

- 6 M. Heidegger, Martin, 1978: "Letter on Humanism" in D. F. Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings*, London: Routledge, p. 217.
- 7 *Mutatis mutandis* a comparison could be made with the Vedic *Vach*, mother of the Vedas, the eternal vibration associated with Prajapati in the work of creation,
- 8 Cf A. Feuillet and P. Grelot, art. "Word," in X. Léon-Dufour (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, London: Chapman, 666-670.
- 9 VD 8, quoting St Bernard, *Homilia super Missus est*, iv,11 ; PL 183,86B
- 10 K. Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, Edinburgh: Nelson, 1961, 24-38.
- 11 There is naturally as well a Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Confucian language underlying national languages and interacting with them.
- 12 As per the title of J.P. Meier' four masterly volumes on the Historical Jesus. On Jesus' sociological setting, see L. Legrand, *The Bible on Cultures*, New-York: Orbis Books, 2004, 73-112.
- 13 Cf. R.E. Brown, "The Parables of Jesus," in *NJBC*, Englewoods Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990, 69-70.
- 14 J. Lambrecht, *Once more astonished: the Parables of Jesus*, New York: Crossroad, 1981
- 15 *Magnesians* 8.
- 16 *Ephesians* 15,19.
- 17 *Punto de Amor* 99. See other texts quoted in my *Christmas Then and Now*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2000, 134-140.
- 18 Translation proposed and justified by J.T. Walsh, "1-2 Kings," in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 172.

UNFOLDING RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: A Methodological Approach

Dr. Sebastian Periannan

1. Assumption

Much of the religious thinking, reflection and activity of the great religions or faith are, after all, precisely concerned with the communication of dogmas, values, attitudes, ideas, messages and information using a variety of media. These media could be local or traditional, modern or mass media, and cyber or social media. In the veritable process of communicating the religious tenets, vibrations, orientations, knowledge and faith, a communication system is being followed faithfully and fortunately. Indeed religions themselves could be seen as powerful systems of important forms of media and message.

It is clear, then, that the area and field of interest of this methodological paper suggesting, “Unfolding Religious Communication Systems” is dauntingly an extensive and any single approach of material from it, would be bound to leave out a very great deal. Therefore, the author assumes that a methodological approach will do justice to the topic at hand.

It seeks to do no more than provide a methodological overview to what, for many researchers will be a new area of interest and commitment. A concern about religious forms of communication system and media and their religious implications is the common denominator underlying the thought patterns and approach which make up this paper. This is not meant to suggest that other areas of research and methodology do not exist or that this particular area is most important. This is only one dimension of massive areas of research methodology and should not be allowed to presume or obscure the existence or significance of

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others. In fact the advances in communications system which have done so much to mould the contours of modernity and religious interactions have made a consciousness of pluralism, religious harmony and otherwise, almost impossible to avoid. It is also interestingly envisaged that a methodological approach will always benefit the areas of future research, academia, and training and for religious practitioners.

2. Relevance and Objectives

One of Paul Tillich's greatest contributions to theology was the insight that religion is being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern. From this aspect, all religions deal with the search for that which is or should be of ultimate concern. (W. Fore in Chris Arthur, p. 56)

Conferences, round-table discussions, and meetings are designed to encourage the spiritual dimension of life. One may even deny the existence of God, but people normally do not deny the spiritual aspect and dimension of human life. Forums and avenues are created to help believers to express their faith through programs and actions in their local communities and wider society. Religious and theological schools are founded on the one side to research and investigate the root paradigms, values, and dogmas or teachings, on the other side to teach the claim's coherence, substance and credibility to each new generation of leaders, followers and thinkers. All these religious activities have in common an essential function: Communication. As Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and others are engaged in worship, education or outreach, at the core they are engaged in active communication. As William Fore describes, "Some of their communication is focused inward- to allow the faithful to speak to each other in the tradition and language of their faith. But if the religion is to survive, much of their communication must be focused outward- to interact with the culture in public testimony, education and mission." (W. Fore in Chris Arthur, p 56)

Since all the religions engage in the vital purpose, form, and method of communication, I wish to propose a methodology to study the Religious Communication System in order to do research on various moral, spiritual and practical nuances offered by each religion.

3. Significance

Today's communication system is dominated by political economy. The enemy is global capitalism. They take control of the economies of their countries. World economy as subservient one to their interest, a market consciousness is constantly created in people with an attempt to wipe out the traditional values of society and life. Communication system is dependent on communication and information technology today more than ever. People are made to think differently, all about self, satisfaction of their needs and interests with no care for others and the environment. Communication system is impacted by weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons of terror; and the USA has terrorized the world with them. The rich and the powerful control the planet's natural resources which affect the communication systems. We are witnessing looting and plunder of natural resources by global corporations in several parts of the world. Communication system also is affected by global financial recession and control that has a greater impact on the religious thinking and activities.

A methodological approach of communication and available means of religious communication system is therefore called for. Thus the main objective of the study at hand concentrates on a method that will enable the reader and researcher to understand the delicate nature of religious systems and process of religious communication. In communication terms, this means that every religious thought and act, both of organized religion and of local or indigenous faith, is socio-culturally formed. Religion comes framed and clothed in religious communication system, such as language, art, music, symbols, paintings, festivals, and history supplied by current mythology, indigenous knowledge and refers to ongoing religious communication system.

4. Theoretical Framework

Ontological theories, epistemological emphasis, socio-cultural realities, technological impact assessment studies, and research methodological concerns have guided the study. Since the study on unfolding the religious communication system is so complex, wide and diverse, for a clearer understanding, we need to take into consideration various theoretical inputs and insights. Ontological and phenomenological theories of a given subject and reality stand as a base and the foundation for this methodological approach. Any scientific enquiry must bring out and result in providing solid and valid knowledge for the field of study, art, science and society. That is why we insist on epistemological emphasis here. Since religions and religious experiences of people have very strong roots from socio-cultural studies, this paper argues that we need to include and incorporate socio-cultural realities for our methodological considerations. Whether we are aware of it or not, day to day experience tells us that we cannot ignore the impact of technology, particularly information and communication technology in our life. Finally, for a scientific approach and result in any research, be it a research as method or research as purpose, the researcher must be clear about the methodology to collect the data, and to correct the faulty methods. Hence, all these above mentioned theoretical considerations are part of this paper for the purpose of furthering the knowledge of religious communication system.

5. Unfolding the Religious Communication Systems

If we are to unfold a religious communication system successfully, we need to be thoroughly familiar with four broad areas of religious phenomenon such as, (i), uniqueness, (ii) similarity, identity, and change, (iii) divergent views, and (iv) convergence. So that we can have a grasp of the root paradigms which underlie religious values and symbols.

- (i) The uniqueness of a religious communication system can

be studied from the aspect and ankle of mystery and intelligibility. The experience of the divine, human, and supernatural realities can be expressed only in symbolic language. In research paradigms, therefore, there will be always a tension and dialectics between faith and reason, mystery and intelligibility. We can know and speak about religious communication system from the research point of view, when we explore the approaches of theological investigations, leadership styles, and moral applications on the one hand, and on the other hand, study the insights of God experiences, mystical utterances, and concrete religious beliefs and practices.

(ii) Similarity, Identity, and Change in religious communication system involves inherent polarity, dissimilarity, broken or continuous, and doubt or bias in researching. Therefore, those ideas, events, persons and their words or world of experience cannot be ignored or altered. The similarity and identity consists mainly in the central fact of religious-event, their beliefs and practices. Change being the unchanging reality, the research has to concentrate on the interpretational and critical reflections on its methodological praxis to understand the unity and plurality from ontological, epistemological and historical values.

(iii) When we observe from the periphery, the divergent views are more prominent than the core or convergent views. Divergence is another potential tension in researching when we look for system because of the embeddedness of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy, and core dogmas in religions. Any experience whether religious, aesthetic or poetic craves for its expression or articulation, in order that the experience may be researched or studied. Therefore, the research must take into consideration the differing world views, unusual styles and subjects in communication media as well.

(iv) Convergence is the longing of any communication system. That being the case, a religious communication system too aspires for convergence. This is viewed from one versus many, universal versus particular, historical, social and contextual versus transcendental,

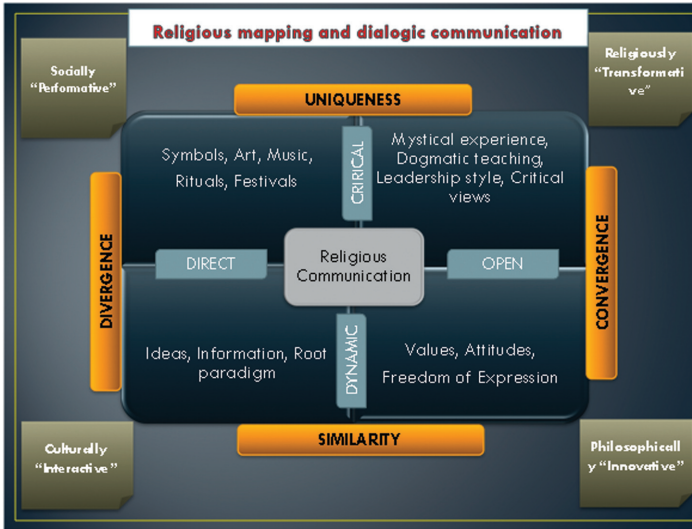
which are the other major areas of research. This is further situated and identified when we look at the ethical orientations, ecological concerns and practices, and ultimately with committed and critical religious analysis for research. Convergence from theory and research perspectives is possible when the focus is on innovative approaches, interactive dialogues, interpretative research, and liberative models of study.

6. Process of Religious Communication

A look at the religious mapping and dialogic communication (table) shows us the clear path for the process of religious communication. The very process is observed and studied from the symbolic language and conceptual process. Conceptual process implies and involves the following characteristics: religious knowledge by listening, writing, reading, primacy of ideas, notional, abstraction, IQ clarity, analytical categories, relationship of words and logic, explanatory method, and temporal order. In the same manner, symbolic language delivers and declares the following structure and processes: religious knowledge by listening, participation, immersion, primacy of perception, experience, inter-action, EQ, dreams, art, music, synthetic view of religious phenomenon, Sensitivity to the signs, and spiritual forces, receptivity to intuition, innovation, and evolution.

Religious communication can be viewed (table) from the four borders of similarity, identity, divergence and convergence. These four borders are directed by four inner directions such as direct, dynamic, critical and open views, opinions and a body of knowledge. Religious communication is “socially performative” at the level of symbols, art, music, rituals and festivals. It is “culturally inter-active” when ideas, information, and root paradigms are interfaced. It is “philosophically innovative”, when values, attitudes, and freedom of expression is exchanged. Finally, religious communication becomes a realization and fulfillment as “religiously transformative”, when mystical experiences, dogmatic teachings, leadership styles, and critical views are studied

and researched scientifically. And hence there is need for a search of a method.



7. In Search of a Method

For, “In Search of a Method”, I follow my book on “Social Research Methodology: An Introduction” (2010), and Richard L. Starcher on “Qualitative Research in Missiological Studies and Practice” (2011). Other details are provided as end notes.

As it has been noted in the objective of this paper, a researcher has to use and innovate various methods so as to get to the roots of the religious communication system for which a methodological approach is a must. And hence, religious science is our focus and goal, philosophy is our guide and tool, and social science, inter-disciplinary approach is our method. Since the area is so vast, just a glimpse of the insights and nuances are outlined here, for further study and research.

We concentrate on this method:
What is real? Ontology,

How knowledge (religious) is acquired? Epistemology, and
What is valued in research? Axiology.

This approach aims to include “narrative inquiry, biography, symbolic interactionism, personal accounts, conversational analysis, discourse analysis, ethnoscience, life history, and participatory action research” (Starcher, p. 55).

7.1 Ontological Perspectives

Creswell as quoted by Starcher, “Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in study” (p. 56)

(i) *Relativism Versus Realism*

A simple understanding of relativism states reality has no independent existence. It is always subject to someone’s perception of it. “Relativism is not a single doctrine but a family of views whose common theme is that some central aspect of experience, thought, evaluation, or even reality is somehow relative to something else” (Starcher, p. 56). Always subject to someone’s perception.

In a similar way, realism is that reality exists independently of anyone’s perception of it. (a). Existence: do rocks or trees really exist? (b) Is there a reality that doesn’t depend on anyone’s perception of it? “everything is relative” “anything goes”, is the general attitude. Both the views are discussed and debated in the research world and parlance.

(ii) *Functional Relativism*

It means, with respect to experience, thought, and evaluation, our understanding of these phenomena depended on their function within the ambient cultures. Thus, Starcher opines, “It is not wrong; it is just different”

This “filtering” raises the question of the relationship between

theology and culture.

(iii) *Theology and Culture*

When we speak about God, we do not use some private language that God gives us. We use everyday language; the language that allows us to communicate the most mundane things as well as the most sublime. For this reason, theology cannot be done without culture; that is both its promise and its perils (Swoyer as cited by Starcher p. 57) .

Now the question arises, how to unfold the communication system?

Based on the above understanding of the ontological perspectives from a three pronged areas of interest as noted above, we as researchers have to engage in an ontological enquiry of the religious mapping and dialogic communication. This is what we mean when we are looking for a method to understand the religious communication system. We need to take into consideration the implications and investigations of “religiously transformative”, values, thoughts, ideas, when mystical experiences, dogmatic teachings, leadership styles, and critical views are studied and researched scientifically.

7.2 Epistemological Perspectives

Epistemology means the study of knowledge and justified belief. It engages in capturing the reality that is properly the domain of Epistemology using qualitative/quantitative approaches such as: i. Positivist/Empiricist tradition, ii. Constructivist Epistemology, iii. Pragmatic Epistemologies, iv. Liberative Research.

(i) *Positivist/Empiricist Tradition*

This paradigm holds that knowledge is possible only through senses. Empiricist approach of research has been equated with

quantitative research whose hallmark is measurability or quantifiability. Its strength is rigor, generalizability, and replicability. It follows the rigor of the natural science where researches are done through a step-by-step process called scientific process.

Ontologically, it assumes that reality exists independently of the observer. Epistemologically, knowledge is taken to be so impersonal and objective that the researcher is considered a detached actor. Deterministically, this approach proposes that wherever observation of reality has causes, prediction and control can be achieved in that aspect of reality. Reality is unitary and it can only be understood by empirical analytic inquiry, the scientific method followed in the classical physical sciences for investigation. Empiricism is not a method of inquiry, but an assumption or justification of knowledge claim. Social Scientists believe they can uncover independent, objective measurable reality with respect to human phenomena. For this reason quantitative methods are preferred.

(ii) *Constructivist Epistemology*

As Denzin and Lincoln view, “Constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co- create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. (as cited Starcher p.58) Thus constructivists do not study human subjects; rather they collaborate with human participants to build agreed-upon understandings of the study’s central phenomenon.

(iii) *Pragmatist Epistemologies*

The focus is on the consequences of research, on the primary importance of the question asked rather than the methods, and multiple methods of data collection inform the problem under study. Thus it is pluralistic and oriented toward “what works” and practice (Creswell & Clark 2007).

(iv) *Liberative Research*

One of the primary aims of this form of research is to contribute to inter-religious dialogue and harmony in the society. Its theoretical rationale is based on an integral view of looking at the socio-cultural and religious reality from the angle of science. In this view, the difference between religion or faith and science will find a new meaning, significance and relevance for the modern man. It could be easily identified and applied with theological and socio-cultural anthropology, insights and techniques from phenomenology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, psychology and sociology have to be integrated, since the very nature of this research is inter-disciplinary. This could also emerge as a new sociology of theological education and liberation, along with critical constructivism, inter-textuality, inter-cultural exchanges, and illuminative religious studies. (Periannan 2010)

Here again, the understanding of religious knowledge system arises. From the epistemological perspectives, we may use qualitative or quantitative approaches, or a mixture of the two. All inquiry is built upon an assumption or hypothesis about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions. What is enshrined in the religious system must be unfolded through a proper and appropriate scientific approach. In order to unfold the system, we need to uncover what is, “culturally inter-active” meaning; ideas, information, and root paradigms of the system as interfaced, as well as, what is, “philosophically innovative”, meaning; values, attitudes, and freedom of expression as exchanged has to be studied.

7.3 Axiological Perspectives

Axiology, in social science research, refers to the values (explicit or implicit) underlying all research, whether qualitative or quantitative. While positivistic quantitative research often poses as objective,

neutral and dispassionate, qualitative researchers “accept the fact that [all] research is ideologically driven” (Janesick, 2000, p. 385) These perspectives include four ways to fulfill the objectives of the study, namely theoretical lenses, theological/religious prism, critical approaches, and transformative values.

(i) *Theoretical Lenses*

While all scientific inquiry is value laden, some qualitative researchers intentionally conduct research using, a particular theoretical lenses, that represents a specific, often marginalized, interpretive community. Interpretative positions provide a pervasive lens or perspective on all aspects of a qualitative research project. e.g. feminist theory, queer theory and critical race theory (Starcher, p. 60).

(ii) *Theological/Religious Prism*

Religious experience and spirituality, as the process, in which one systematically trains sensitivity, to gain regular transcendental consciousness; and ecological spirituality with nature, an inner experience of belonging to larger whole.

(iii) *Critical Approaches*

This inquiry starts with an agenda, “Those of us who openly call ourselves ‘criticalists’ definitely share a value orientation. We are all concerned about social inequalities, and we direct our work toward positive social change” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 3) A Critical ethnographer will study issues of power, empowerment, inequality, dominance, repression, hegemony, and victimization, Aids crisis, media and legal system, drug, sex, violence, and cultural rebellion.

(iv) *Transformative Values*

All researchers have convictions about what is good and valuable

in this world. We can always use tools whether theoretical methods or research methods, that allow us to get close to people, understand their situations, and perspectives, give voice to their concerns, and work for our common good which ultimately involves the transformation of life.

I find four aspects of values (theoretical lenses, theology/religious prism, critical approaches, and transformative values) of particular interest because they help us understand the religious communication value system in doing any type of research. Relying on axiological frame, we can use the method, to study the religious communication system, from the four borders of similarity, identity, divergence and convergence; these four borders are directed by four inner directions such as direct, dynamic, critical and open views, opinions and a body of knowledge. Axiological principles are of utmost importance to observe and investigate, what is, “socially performative” at the level of symbols, art, music, rituals and festivals.

The Asian Research Centre for Religion and Communication (ARC) in Bangkok is opening the wider horizon for future research, reflection and religious understanding for harmony, dialogue and transformation. We can always use tools, techniques, and strategies (whether theoretical constructs or research methods) that allow us to get closer to the reality of the people, understand their perspectives, give voice to their concerns, and work for our common good, which ultimately involves the advancement of religious knowledge, truth, spirituality and wisdom for a better a world.

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**5th ARC Roundtable:
“Religion and Communication in a Multi-Religious Setting –
An Asian Perspective”**

organized by the

*Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at
Mudra Institute for Communications Ahmedabad (MICA), India
October 16 to 19, 2012*

The 5th Roundtable of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication was held, for the first time, outside Bangkok. The participants from India at the 4th Roundtable (2011) invited the delegation to study religions and social communication in a multi-religious setting like India. Thus, the venue was set in Ahmedabad, India.

This year’s conference was organized under the theme “Religion and Communication in a Multi-Religious Setting – An Asian Perspective” with Mudra Institute for Communications Ahmedabad (MICA) and the Taleem Research Foundation (Ahmedabad) <<http://taleemindia.org>> at the helm of organization.

Aiming to promote research in the field of religion and social communication in India itself, the organizers brought as much as half of the intended number of participants from the sub-continent while the remaining half came from other Asian countries.

The venue, MICA, is India’s foremost learning institution in Communications Management. Established in 1991, it boasts not only of highly technical, but creative and development-oriented courses as well. Its present crop of some 350 students are foreseen to have an edge being well-rounded and balanced in tackling the challenges of their future jobs. See <www.mica-india.net>

The conference was held from October 16-19, 2012 with scholars

from various religious traditions – Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity and others.

At the opening, ARC Director Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd ¹ introduced the participants to the center’s history and thrusts as well as the background for this year’s conference. ARC board member, Dr. Chainarong Monthienvichienchai, ² stressed the need for religions to actively engage in this kind of research and, wherever possible, cross-examine study results within and among religious traditions.

Dr. Binod Agrawal, head of ARC’s partner organization the Taleem Research Foundation in Ahmedabad, also formally welcomed the participants as did the former and current president of the conference host and venue: Dr. Arbind Sinha and Dr. Nagesh Rao, respectively.

The participants then presented their papers under the following titles:

1. **“Unfolding Religious Communication Systems: A Methodological Approach”** by Rev. Dr. Sebastian Periannan (ARC Board Member from St. Peter’s Pontifical Institute, Bangalore)
2. **“Religion, Mythology and its Judicious Use of Power”** by Dr. Arbind Sinha and Dr. Vineet Singh (MICA)
3. **“Communications in Multi-Religious India – A Folk Perspective”** by Rev. Dr. Vincent B. Wilson (National Association for Tribal and Folk Media)
4. **“Communication for Community Development: Case of**

¹ Dr. Eilers, svd is Professor and Program Coordinator of MAT-SPC (Masters in Theology, major in Social/Pastoral Communication) at the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, Manila. See <www.ust.edu.ph>

² Dr. Monthienvichienchai is Chancellor of St. John’s University in Bangkok, where ARC is housed. See <www.international.stjohn.ac.th>

- Volunteer Graduated Monks”** by Ven. Dr. Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai, Ph.D. (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University [MCU], Chiang Mai, Thailand)
5. **“Exploring the Diegesis of the *Haridasi Kirtan*”** by By Dr. Sanjay Ranade (Department of Communication and Journalism, University of Mumbai)
 6. **“*Jama’ah Islamiyyah: An Example of Mis-communicating Religious Sacred Scripture of Islam*”** by Dr. H. Gunawan Adnan (State Institute for Islamic Studies [IAIN], Banda Aceh)
 7. **“Hinduism and Internet in 2010-12: An essay on websites, blogs, social media, censorship and *Internet Hindu*”** by Dr. Kiran Thakur (Flame School of Communication, Pune)
 8. **“Multi-Religious Communication in Malaysia”** by Dr. Abdul Muati Ahmad (University of Putra Malaysia) – *paper only*
 9. **“Religious Perceptions and Practices in Vietnamese Society”** by Prof. Anh Vu Ta (Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, Manila)
 10. **“Influences of Religious Telecasts in Multi-Religious India: An Analysis”** by Dr. Binod Agrawal (Taleem Research Foundation, Ahmedabad)
 11. **“Jainism: Its Philosophical Foundations and the Re-Adaptation through Media and Communication”** by Dr. Komal Shah (National Institute of Mass Communication and Journalism [NIMCJ] Ahmedabad)
 12. **“Introduction to Sikhism (Communicating Faith thru Religious Symbols and Practices)** by Dr. B. S. Bhatia (Gurudwara Ahmedabad/ Taleem Research Foundation)
 13. **“The Communication Dimension of Religious Practices of Hindu**

People in Southern France” by Dr. France Azema (University of Toulouse, France)

14. **“Religion and Religious Sentiments in Political Communications in Korea”** by Dr. Han Su-Kyung (University of Incheon, Seoul)
15. **“The Communication Dimension of Karma in Jain Belief System”** by Dr. Pravin C. Shah
16. **“Internet Addiction: A Pastoral Approach”** by Prof. Anthony Roman (Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, Manila)

During the conference, the participants also visited the following religion and communication centers for exposure and on-site learning:

1. Sikh Temple *Gurudwara Gobinddham*, Ahmedabad [*Gurudwara* or “way to the Guru” in Gujarati language] <www.gurudwara.net> ,
2. *Gurjarvani* Jesuit Communication Center Ahmedabad <www.gurjarvani.org>
3. Jain TV Ahmedabad < <http://jainstudiosltd.com>> , and
4. Shanti Business School, Ahmedabad < www.shantibschool.edu.in>

The study tours were equally considered high points of the conference. Listening to talks and experiencing the activities, the participants became more aware of the praxis of religion and social communication in India. The participants not only explored the field first-hand, they also strengthened their ties while helping expand the ARC Research Network.

The entire experience showed how religious communication is actually inter-woven with related fields like business and political communication. To understand religious communication better, the participants said research should consider the intersection/s between religion, communication, business and politics in Asian societies.

The following recommendations for the center and its network of scholars/ researchers were then forwarded:

1. The participants should encourage their colleagues and other communication scholars in Asia to engage in research, exploring the relations and intersections between religion and social communication.
2. The ARC network should help streamline and clearly define key concepts such as “social communication,” “communication society” and others, in relation to religion and communication.
3. Future researches should investigate the role of religion in secularized, even commercial, activities, e.g. the festive celebration honoring the Hindu Mother goddess, *Durga*, which the participants actually have witnessed.
4. Related to this, research can explore how modern communication technologies are affecting religious expressions, and conversely, how people’s religious convictions help shape the use of these technologies. This type of research would be ARC’s important contribution, considering the ever-changing and different communication landscape/s in Asia today.
5. Researchers in the field should investigate/verify existing literature on “ritual communication” and how it is applied to many of today’s secular/commercial activities with deep religious undertones. ARC must be able to assist researchers who wish to venture in this line of research, in terms of methodology, theoretical framework, and related literature.
6. As a matter of policy, researchers must bring to fore the communication dimension of the religious phenomena being studied.
7. Researches must explore the deeper reasons for certain phenomena

using an inter-disciplinary approach, borrowing from well-established theories and concepts in psychology, anthropology, theology and other fields.

8. The ARC website should clearly reflect priorities and thrusts of the Center. Online versions of published articles, abstracts and book reviews will be made available to members of the ARC Network in a special “Members’ Area” section.

On the role of ARC Roundtables, the following considerations came up:

1. ARC Roundtables are to promote and animate research in general, and provide a forum where representatives of different religions can gather, learn about each other’s experiences, as well as dialogue regarding common issues and concerns. Roundtables can only be devoted to specific themes or areas of research in a limited way.
2. Future Roundtables should allocate sufficient time for reflection and clarification after each presentation.
3. Regional conferences may be organized, say, by an ARC-India chapter. Such conferences may provide answers to specifically local research questions, and make up possible themes for the yearly Roundtable on the Asian level.

In the end, gratitude was extended to the organizers of this year’s Roundtable for providing useful case studies to the participants. Future Roundtables should include similar study tours for deepening and enrichment.

The participants extended their appreciation to MICA and its partner agencies for the excellent preparation and proper academic atmosphere. Thanks were given to the ARC administration and local supporters:



- a. Taleem Research Foundation
- b. National Institute of Mass Communication and Journalism
- c. Shanti Business School, Ahmedabad
- d. Jain TV Ahmedabad
- e. Sikh Temple *Gurudwara Gobinddham*, Ahmedabad.



**10 YEARS OF
“RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION” –
Journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion
and Social Communication**

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

With the year 2012, “Religion and Social Communication,” the Journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) completes 10 years. After the establishment of the center on November 25, 1999 at Saint John’s University, in cooperation with Assumption University (ABAC) in Bangkok, the regular publication started in 2003 with articles like on the Role of Social Communication in the Protection of Cultural Values and Religions of Indigenous Peoples with Spirituality in Indian Media, the Public Interest in Religious Broadcasting in Korea, and also Church Communication as a Research Concern of the University of the Philippines at Los Baños (UPLB). The second edition released in the same year brought two articles on Globalization and Reflections on Philosophical Paradigms and Problems of Religious Communication.

The second year’s edition started with Methodological Issues in Applying the Perception of Religious Minorities but also the Contributions on Religion and Journalistic Perception of Ethics, followed by articles on Broadcasting in the Philippines and Malaysia as well as Television Violence and Children.

The following years addressed the communication in big religions like Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism but also Christianity. Also themes like Meals and Celebrations in Asian Cultures and Asian Religions in Cyberspace were taken up.

By country, the contributions of the Journal came from different Asian contexts like India, Thailand, Korea, Philippines, Indonesia, China and Cambodia.

Several times over the years the Journal was not able to publish a second issue, thus, coming up with one double issue to keep the flow. By now, the Journal has returned to its regular rhythm of twice a year and this should be also the rule in the coming years. Beside articles, the Journal publishes also occasionally reports on meetings and initiatives which are related to the concerns of the center.

The section on Book Notes and Book Reviews should be further developed and serve research interests especially with such publications which are of special concerns to the members and scholars of the Asian researchers' network. The Journal should further give the opportunity to young scholars or special university programs related to the concerns of the center.

The Journal is sent to the members of the ARC researchers' network but also to other interested subscribers especially universities and university libraries and partly also in publication exchange programs between these institutions. Recipients are dependent on the recommendations of the network and members of the ARC.

In the coming years the Journal will be further developed into a scientific instrument far beyond the center in Bangkok.

Articles published in the Journal are evaluated by an Editorial Team as a requirement for publication.

Thai Pilgrimage to the Golden Buddha

Phyo Hein Wai

Abstract

This study measures the motivational factors of Thai visitors who make their repeated pilgrimage trip to Kyite Htee Yoe or Golden Rock Pagoda of Myanmar. As tourism at Golden Rock Pagoda has grown to be famous and becoming one of the world's popular pilgrimage tourist destinations, this study of Thai repeat-tourists—who outnumber other non-resident tourists for over 6 years—seek to identify the factors of the tourists' faith, site-experience, travelling companionship and attractions at the site in accordance with their demography. A survey, using non-probability convenience sampling, was conducted on two hundred (200) Thai repeat-visitors at the site of Golden Rock Pagoda during February 2012. This study treats the result by using Descriptive Analysis through One-way ANOVA, Independent T-test and Pearson's Correlation Co-efficient Test. This study discovered the key motivational factors, ranked from the most favorable one to the least respectively, (1) faith and spiritual attainment; (2) attractions; followed by (3) accompanying people and (4) site experience.

Moreover, a positive association was found within the motivational factors of site experience, accompanying people and attractions all having relations with faith and spiritual attainment. Based on the hypothesis testing results, different views were found among visitors' faith and spiritual attainment when judged by their gender. Thai visitors' age and occupation played significant roles in determining their views on site experience, while their factors of age, gender, marital status, and occupation could significantly influence their views on accompanying people. Marital status alone could be an influential factor to Thai repeat visitors' views on attractions of Golden Rock Pagoda. To provide appropriate environment for the Thai repeat-visitors to Golden Rock Pagoda, this study recommends that the authorities concerned

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improve tourism facilities and the religious sanctuaries to be more conducive and enhancing to the Thai repeat-visitors.

Key Words: Pilgrimage tourism, Repeat visit, Motivational factors

Introduction

Pilgrimage has long been a motivation for journeys since the beginning of human civilization. People—regardless of faith—first traveled to sacred sites and visited places for religious purposes. Every religion has its own pilgrimage. Buddhism, despite its absence of a deity, draws its followers to several places in North India, where the Lord Buddha's life evolved. Myanmar, as a cradle of the Buddhist Theravada Sect, has been a popular destination of religious tourism for pilgrims for centuries, not only among the followers in the country but also the upholders of Buddhism at large.

Known as the Land of Pagodas for her wealth of arts, ancient architecture, and culture as a result of centuries-old Buddhist heritage, Myanmar has housed prominent religious sites all over the country. According to the Ministry on Hotels and Tourism (<http://www.tourism-myanmar.org/>), Thai visitors have topped all the international visitors to Myanmar. Their popular destination is the Golden Rock Pagoda (GRP)—officially known in Myanmar as *kyite tee yoe*—as Thais have long believed it to be sacred as their wishes have apparently been answered there. As the political situation in Myanmar has gradually eased, opportunities for tourism—religious or cultural—are expected to revive more dynamically.

The Golden Rock Pagoda (GRP) is situated in the town of *kyitehto* in the State of Mon. The stream of tourists apparently receives little attention from the authorities concerned and studies on the GRP with regard to tourism development are meager. This study would help form healthy tourism management of the GRP—environment

and socio-cultural balance—that becomes a good example for many pilgrimage destinations in Myanmar. The aim of this study is to identify the motivational factors of Thai repeat-visitors and to identify the inter-relationship within the motivational factors of Thai repeat-visitors in accordance with their demographic factors. Hence, in order to improve the facilities and religious activities at the site in accordance with Thai repeat-visitors.

Review of Literature

Pilgrimage Tourism

Pilgrimage tourism is a form of travelling to a sacred destination wherein one's religious motive is strongly involved. Shuo, Ryan & Liu, (2008) stated that pilgrimage sites are like other tourism destination sites that can attract not only pilgrims or devotees, but also many tourists regardless of their religious belief and nationality. Pilgrimage tourism and various forms of religious travel, not only co-exist but also appear to be blended (Singh, 2004). Although pilgrimage is one of the oldest forms of tourism, it has many other implications other than the core aspects of devotion and spirituality. One can differ as sight-seeing, travel excursion, buying cultural art work and souvenirs, long tiring journey, local food and accommodation (Gupta, 1999). Since ancient times, pilgrims travel to their holy places and religious shrines for their spiritual belief. Pilgrims experience not only the journey towards the destination itself; they also experience the destination in physical and spiritual ways. Yet pilgrims and devotees also need some activities along the way, maybe some recreation, sight-seeing or other activities. Gertler (1993) stated that “from many perspectives in pilgrimage tourism, the primary reason for pilgrims to visit pilgrimage sites are to seek answers and fulfill one's inner need. However, there are an extent of factors which also include the offerings, the décor of the shrine, beauty and atmosphere of peace. Any form of tourists are attracted to places which they can feel the physical beauty and its natural scenery” (pp, 65-66).

Repeat Visit

Repeat visits to a destination or a country is important for the tourism industry. At present, there are many tourist destinations in the world that receive repeat visitors. Repeat visitation can be defined as a local or abroad journey to a destination which previously had been visited (Gitelson & Crompton, 1984).

Repeat tourists are the ones who have the intention to return to the same destination rather than first time visitors on their holidays. The second visit from a tourist creates a high possibility of that tourist becoming a repeat visitor in the future (Juaneda, 1996). Cultural tourism plays a vital role in attracting a great number of tourists (Xie & Xu, 2004). Likewise, cultural similarities are also one of the factors that influence tourists to repeat visit a destination. Richards, (1996) stated that cultural heritage tourists were regular travelers who frequently travel to heritage locations. The more likely the cultural similarity they have with each other, both in culture and belief, the more likely they are to return to the destination as they feel comfortable with the culture at the destination. People who have cultural similarities will travel to the country that has closeness in culture and tradition. Cultural similarity is influential in terms of repeat visits to a destination. Gitelson & Crompton (1984) stated that repeat visitors are in search for relaxation and they are possibly older. Moutiho & Trimble (1991) stated that repeat visitors want to travel to nearer destinations. Repeat visits to the same destination can come from the influence of a sense of personal or family attachment to the place (Gitelson & Crompton 1984; Lee & Allen 1999; Kyle, Graefe, Manning & Bacon, 2003).

Despite major factors such as satisfaction and previous experience to the same destination playing a key role for the repeat visitors to return, repeat visits can be influenced by other inspirational factors. Crompton and Mackay (2007) discussed that accompanying family and friends, having fun, or enjoying the atmosphere can also affect intention to return to the destination as well.

Motivational factors of Thai repeat tourists

Poria, Reichel, Biran (2006), explained that motivational factors that involve pilgrimages and the impact on pilgrims show that their faith is primarily the reason for the visit for most tourists. Chand (2010), explained five crucial motivations namely: cultural fascination, religious attractions, seeking friendship and companionship, seeking novelty and family togetherness.

Faith and Spiritual Attainment: One motivational factor on the pilgrims is their faith and devotion, this being the main purpose for visiting pilgrimage sites, (Poria, Reichel & Biran, 2006).

Site Experience: Visitors' site experience is one of the key motives to revisit the destination because destinations are more likely to be meaningful places in terms of experience which they encountered on the journey, (Backlund & Willams, 2003).

Accompanying People: Pilgrims physically and spiritually travel with the groups in which they have a common interest, common goals and motivation, (Devereux & Carnegie, 2006). Religious travelers rarely travel alone to the pilgrimage destinations. They prefer travelling with family and companions.

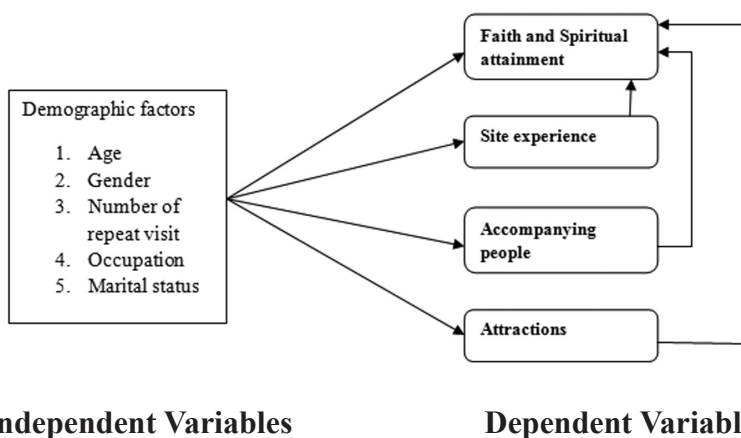
Attractions: Attractions can be described as unique factors that have heightened due to the growing interest by travelers to visit exotic, settings and artifacts that can be considered different from the visitors' homeland and offer diverse attractions. Poria, Butler & Airey, (2004), also claimed that cultural heritage tourists are in search for cultural attractions and knowledge at a heritage destination.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The conceptual framework is based on the review of literature. The framework features on the motivational factors of Thai repeat-

visitors to the Golden Rock Pagoda. The independent variables are the demographic factors (age, gender, number of repeat visit, occupation and marital status) that have an influence on dependent variables of motivational factors of Thai repeat-visitors' faith and spiritual attainment, site experience, accompanying people and attractions. This study examines the motivational factors of Thai visitors' repeat visit to the Golden Rock Pagoda.

Figure 1- Conceptual Framework



Created by the author for this study

Methodology

This study identified the motivational factors of Thai repeat-visitors to the Golden Rock Pagoda and then identified the inter-relationship within the motivational factors in order to test the relation of religion and tourism. Therefore, descriptive statistics was applied to find out the key motivations for Thai repeat-visitors to the Golden Rock Pagoda. The questionnaires were distributed to two hundred (200) respondents at the study site. The process of pre-testing allows researchers to determine whether the respondents have any ambiguous

questions or difficulty in understanding the questionnaire (Zikund, 2000).

A pretest by mean of Cronbach's Alpha was conducted by distributing the questionnaires to 30 samples. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients less than 0.60 are generally considered to be poor and those greater than 0.60 are considered to be reliable. The total variable (0.865) is greater than 0.60 and the questionnaire considered reliable.

This study used non probability, convenience sampling method due to the fact that the research questionnaires were distributed only to Thai repeat-visitors. In order to identify Thai repeat-visitors, the questionnaires contain a screening question at the top and were asked whether the respondent had visited before to the Golden Rock Pagoda at least twice. Convenience sampling is widely used for obtaining units or people who are most conveniently available (Zikmund, 2000). The researcher used a self-administered questionnaire.

The questionnaire used both English and Thai languages for the convenience of the Thai respondents. The questionnaires were collected over a period: from 24 February until 28 February 2012. Likewise, the distribution was done in both day and night around the Golden Rock Pagoda for six to eight hours per day. During the questionnaire distribution, the researcher also had interviews with ten randomly chosen respondents in order to find out their opinions regarding site improvements. The researcher distributed questionnaires at the nearby areas of the pagoda, the vicinity of the pagoda, near hotels and along the path to the pagoda. The researcher conducted additional interviews with the Thai repeat tourists on the site in order to identify their needs and desires, opinion at and around the destination. The number of respondents at the site were 10 randomly chosen Thai repeat visitors. However, many respondents were not able to communicate in English for the interview to proceed. The personal interviews were conducted around the site and distributing qualitative questionnaires on 25th, 26th and 27th of February 2012. Altogether it has 40 questions.

The questionnaire has 2 parts, the first part consists of 35 questions about the motivational factors of the respondents' repeat visit using a 5-Point-Liker scale. The second part consists of 5 questions, which ask the respondents' demographic factors i.e. age, gender, number of repeat visits, occupation and marital status. The results of the 200 questionnaires entered into a data file were processed by Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 15. The following inferential statistics were used to test the research hypotheses.

The independent t-test was to test significant differences between respondents' gender and ANOVA to test the significant differences in terms of demographic factors. The Pearson's Correlation was applied to test the inter-relationship within the motivational factors of Thai repeat-visitors.

Data Analysis and Findings

This study of the majority of Thai repeat-visitors to the Golden Rock Pagoda and the demographic factors yielded the following results: most of them are within the age range between 41-50 years (45.0%) old, female tourists (59.5%) visited more, they were on their 2nd (57.5%) visit to the destination, and they were on the business sector (35.5%) and most of them are married and with children (44.5%).

As table 1 shows the mean score Thai repeat-visitors' motivational factors to the Golden Rock Pagoda (GRP) of faith and spiritual attainment (with the divine power of GRP, prayers and wishes will be granted) has the highest mean score of (4.37), attractions (surroundings and nature around the GRP make a pleasant visit and statues of Buddha images show artistic value) has a mean score of (4.21), accompanying people (religiousness of tour group members add more value) has a mean score of (4.03) and site experience (GRP site pleasant and conducive for religious acts) has the lowest mean score of (3.61).

Table 1 – Descriptive Statistics of the Respondents

Faith and Spiritual Attainment	Mean
with the divine power of GRP, prayers and wishes will be granted	4.37
Attractions	Mean
surroundings and nature around the GRP make a pleasant visit and statues of Buddha images show artistic value	4.21
Accompanying people	Mean
religiousness of tour group members add more value	4.03
Site experience	Mean
GRP site pleasant and conducive for religious acts	3.61

As indicated in (Appendix 1), *Hypotheses 1 to 4* test the difference among demographic factors of the respondents (age, gender, number of repeat visits, marital status, and occupation) and visitors' faith and spiritual attainment, site experience, accompanying people and attractions.

The findings from *hypothesis 1* show that there is a difference among visitors' faith and spiritual attainment upon their visit in terms of *gender* ($Sig = .003$). The result indicates that men and women show differences when classified by their faith and spiritual attainment.

Hypothesis 2 indicates that there is a difference among visitors' site experience upon their visit in terms of *age* ($Sig = .002$) and *occupation* ($Sig = .008$). The result shows that *age 31-40, 41-50* are more interested about site experience than those whose ages are *less than or equal to 20-30* and *above 50* group. Moreover, there is a difference among site experience in terms of occupation ($Sig = .008$). It can be concluded

that people who are working in *Business* and *Government* are more interested about site experience than students and retirees.

Hypothesis 3 indicates that there is a difference among visitors' accompanying people upon their visit in terms of age ($Sig = .008$), the age range of *above 50* have more interest than the age range of *less than or equal to 20-30* and *41-50*. There is a difference in terms of gender ($Sig = .046$). In terms of marital status ($Sig = .008$), the result indicates that those who are *married and with children* have more interest than those who are *single*, and those who considered themselves *single but dating and married but alone now*.

In terms of occupation ($Sig = .024$), *business* people have more interest than *students* visiting the destination. *Hypothesis 4* indicates that there is a difference among visitors' attractions in terms of *marital status* ($Sig = .044$), this implies that those who are *married with no children* and those who are *married with children* have more interest than *single* persons regarding attractions at the Golden Rock Pagoda.

According to (Appendix 2) *Hypotheses 5, 6* and *7* tests the relationship between site experience, accompanying people and attractions with faith and spiritual attainment. The null hypotheses was rejected in all therefore, *H5* site experience impacts upon faith and spiritual attainment ($r = .22$) has a weak positive relationship and *H6* accompanying people ($r = .41$), *H7* attractions ($r = .30$) both have moderate positive relationship with faith and spiritual attainment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study determined that Thai repeat visitors to the Golden Rock Pagoda (GRP) are consistent with the fact of empirical study conducted by Shuo, Ryan and Liu (2008) as pilgrimages sites are like other tourism destinations. The primary motive of pilgrims and visitors in their re-visitation to the temple was their high level of religious belief and devotion.

However there are many other reasons to explore at the pilgrimage site for the visitors to return. The main reasons to revisit are: (1) due to their faith and spiritual attainment as many believe that the divine power of the GRP will make their prayers granted, (2) the attractions at the site as surroundings around the vicinity have a lush environment and make a pleasant visit, and (3) furthermore, the status and deities of Buddha images displays as well. Another reason for their revisit is because of the accompanying people travelling to the GRP showed faith and religiousness of the tour group members add more value to the visit and lastly, the site experience at the GRP perceived as pleasant and conducive to performing religious acts for visitors.

The second objective of this study attempts to investigate the inter-relationship within the motivational factors of Thai repeat visitors to the Golden Rock Pagoda. The results were based on the hypotheses testing of *H5*, *H6* and *H7*. As Poria, Reichel and Biran (2006) discovered in their findings that although faith is the primary reason for many visitors to visit pilgrimage sites, motivation for pilgrimage also concentrates on involvement in leisure, recreational activities and family togetherness. In this study it is also found out that there is a positive association within the motivational factors. The findings reaffirm the claim what Sharpely and Sudaram (2005) made by saying that religious tourism constitutes a sacred journey coexisted with faith and tourism. Tourism is linked to faith and spirituality. Thai repeat visitors' faith and spiritual attainment is intertwined along within their motivational factors of site experience, accompanying people and attractions. This provides that tourism activities are also involved at a pilgrimage destination and the role of tourism activities function together with religious activities. As tourism and religion are blended, they provide a way of improvements at the destination for tourism authorities of the Golden Rock Pagoda to increase tourists and repeat visitors' faith while visiting a religious site and enhance their spirituality.

Recommendations

One of the recommendations is for the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar. As the Ministry plays a key role and is the governing body of the tourism sector in the country. Forty-three percent (43%) of Thai repeat visitors were on their 3rd visit or more to the GRP. Thus, Thai visitors' arrival to Myanmar is significant in numbers. Thus on-arrival visa should be granted to Thai tourists for their convenience. The transportation is considered dangerous, unsafe and uncomfortable for elders and females especially during the rainy season and people travel on large trucks. Thus, the authorities should manage buses or mini buses to replace the trucks. In addition cleanliness in public toilets and regular check-ups are required. And in order to appeal more to the repeat visitors' attention in terms of appreciation of artistic work and architecture at the site, the authorities should build and create more buildings that represent the history of Buddhism and drawings of the legends of the Golden Rock Pagoda.

Another recommendation is for the Myanmar Tourism Board for tourist information centers to provide inquiry services for tourists visiting the Golden Rock Pagoda. In addition, there should be information desks and guide maps both in English and Thai or even in other languages to help visitors be aware of the features and settings of the place. Likewise for small numbers of groups who would like to visit on their own, the travel associations and agencies are recommended to provide more necessary information for backpackers or free independent travelers and family tour group (FITs).

Lastly, for the local community, the restaurants and the food are observed as unclean from the visitors' viewpoint. Likewise, the menus are written in the local language (except in hotels). Thus, from a managerial point of view, restaurants must attempt to increase cleanliness and focus on hygienic food preparation for tourists. Moreover, both Thai and English language menus should be available at restaurants and cafes in order to cater to the visitors.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study focuses on the motivational factors that provide impetus to the repeat visitors' to return to a pilgrimage destination and examining visitors' needs and suggestions on overall infrastructure improvements at the Golden Rock Pagoda destination in Myanmar. Thus, the researcher feels that in the future further research should investigate a qualitative study of repeat tourists' behavior towards visiting the Golden Rock Pagoda.

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Appendix 1

Hypotheses		Level of Significance	Results
H1: there is no difference among demographic factors and visitors' faith and spiritual attainment	Age	.085	Accepted
	Gender	.003	Rejected
	Number of repeat visit	.409	Accepted
	Marital status	.166	Accepted
	Occupation	.142	Accepted
H2: there is no difference among demographic factors and visitors' site experience	Age	.002	Rejected
	Gender	.599	Accepted
	Number of repeat visit	.576	Accepted
	Marital status	.278	Accepted
	Occupation	.008	Rejected
H3: there is no difference among demographic factors and visitors' accompanying people	Age	.008	Rejected
	Gender	.046	Rejected
	Number of repeat visit	.290	Accepted
	Marital status	.008	Rejected
	Occupation	.024	Rejected
H4: there is no difference among demographic factors and visitors' attractions	Age	.053	Accepted
	Gender	.227	Accepted
	Number of repeat visit	.461	Accepted
	Marital status	.044	Rejected
	Occupation	.072	Accepted

Appendix 2

Hypotheses	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig.	Result
<i>H5</i>	.22	.002	Rejected
<i>H6</i>	.41	.000	Rejected
<i>H7</i>	.30	.000	Rejected

NOTES**Call for Papers**

Our network member in Israel, Yoel Cohen, is planning on two books dealing on the following themes: “Advertising and Religion” and “Religious Communities and the Internet”. He is looking for researchers who can contribute chapters on “Images of Religion in Advertising: Theological Approaches to Ethics of Advertising, Public Relations by Religious Communities.” For the “Religious Communities and the Internet” he is looking for contributions on the general view of religions on Internet (positive, reserved etc.), the training of clergy in Information Technology and its use, and the building of religious websites. He is looking for scholars in these fields from the following religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Jainism. Anybody interested?

ARC Roundtable 2013

The annual Roundtable of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication will be held from October 21 to 24, 2013 in Thailand under the Theme: “Religion and Social Communication in Changing Cultures of Asia”. Papers and proposals for this theme are welcome. Participation in the Roundtable, however, is by invitation only.

BOOK REVIEWS

Yoel Cohen: **“God, Jews and the Media – Religion and Israel’s Media.”** New York: Routledge (2012). ISBN 978-0415-4750307 (hbk), 978-0-203-12334-8 (ebk). pp. 260.

Over the years, Yoel Cohen has researched in the field of religion and communication in Israel and published some of his findings in professional periodicals. Here now is, not only a summary of his work but also a more systematic presentation of religion and the media in Israel. The book is published in the Routledge “Jewish Studies” series and not in the communication section of the publishing house.

The author presents his book under three main headings: (1) Mediated Judaism, (2) Media culture wars and issues on mediated Judaism to be followed by (3) Conclusions. After “Media Judaism and Culture” and “The Jewish Theory of Communication” in the first part, the struggle between different religious movements, values and ideology follow and the difficult “Identity, Unity and Discord” in the field. The “Issues in Mediated Judaism” not only present the dilemma with the Internet but also handle e.g. “Kosher Advertising” and “Marketing of the Rabbi.”

In his Introduction, Cohen states that the book “examines how Jewish religion and the Jews of Israel have been influenced by the media” (p. xii). The study starts with “Israel television interviews God” as a Preface and a very lively report on the actions and reactions of the chief rabbi with a vision of the Almighty in his sleep and the wish of God to speak to the Jewish people through television. But when the interviewer asked Him as to why He decided to speak to mankind now and through a channel which He never used before, there was silence for a long time.

In difference to Jewish religion with faith, moral code, law, worship, etc. the author sees “information” as the opposite of faith because it must be verifiable. In his section on “The Jewish Theory of

Communication” he refers to the relation between media and religion in other societies and talks about the birth of a “sub-discipline” and “inter-disciplinary approach that takes into account the surrounding media and culture which examines effects among media, religion and culture at the individual, societal and institutional level.” He mentions several, mostly recent periodicals from the American perspective (p. 6ff.) which cannot be applied necessarily to other countries and languages. Thus, in German speaking countries the first academic quarterly on Religion and Social Communication, *Communicatio Socialis* “Internationale Zeitschrift fuer Kommunikation in Religion, Kirche und Gesellschaft” began already 1968 and still exists until today. The periodical tries to combine Theology and Communication especially for the Catholic Church.

In fact, most of the American approaches seem to come from sociology (of religion) but not from theology, a difference which might be considered also for Israel where Cohen proposes in his book as a sub-discipline “Media, Judaism and Culture” (MJC) (p. 228f.). One might also question here the use of the word “Media” which confines itself somehow to technical means whereas the expression “Social Communication” comprises all ways and means of communicating in human society and thus is much broader and not confined to “means” only.

A breakdown of the Jewish population into their religious beliefs and patterns shows the dilemma in relation to the media. While the “Haredim” population (ultra-orthodox) with 8 percent on the one side of the population spectrum has a very restricted relation to media, the “Modern Orthodox” with 10 percent are a little bit more open to the secular community being between State and Religiosity another 42 percent of the population are between secular and religious communities (p. 109). This determines also their relation to the media. On the other hand, the author also observes that “religious structures have been replaced by media structures” (p. 119f.), but despite this still 10 percent of the content of the general media relates to religion.

Frequently, the book refers to studies on Religion and Media in the United States (Buddenbaum. Hoover e.a.), which, however, cannot that easily be compared with the Israeli situation which must be still considered as being a somewhat religious state..

Rabbis are “adored” in the religious but not in the secular press: “while Rabbis are ideal role models for the audiences of religious media, they are despised role models for general media audiences” (p. 129).

In view of the Jewish “diaspora” with the biggest groupings in New York and London, the Internet seems to substitute direct traditional reporting in a growing way with television being negligent. The main sources of news are taken from the secular newspapers instead of limited own resources (p. 195).

Israel as being a “Holy Land” not only for Judaism but also for Christianity and Islam plays a role in reporting including the reports on a ‘competition’ of these religions on certain holy sites (p. 207 f.). “Pope Paul’s visit to the Holy Land in 2000” with “some 1.500 reporters” was according to Cohen “the biggest religious news event in the history of the Israeli state” (p. 211). But it was not “Pope Paul” who is meant here but it was Pope John Paul II who visited Israel in 2000 whom Pope Benedict XVI followed later in visiting Israel.

In general Cohen feels that “foreign audiences are inclined to understand the Jewish religion itself in Israel through the prism of conflict. The richness of the Jewish tradition in its manifold features and multi-layered value system gets narrowed and distorted. Features and values comprising conflict become projected, whereas other features and values lacking a seeming conflict dimension fail to get covered.” (p. 216).

Cohen talks in his study about a “Media Religion discipline” and refers to different categories like pastoral theology and others (p. 228) without considering the above mentioned concept of *social*

communication which was proposed by the Second Vatican Council document *Inter Mirifica* (1963). This would widen the concept and relate it more to Religion and Society since it refers to all ways and means of communication of and in a human society where Religion plays a vital role. Modern expressions like “social media” and “social networks” seem to strengthen this understanding which also leads to a rethinking of the proposal of a sub-study group “Media, Judaism and Culture.”

The author further states that a response from Judaism on Ethics is “sorely” missing (p. 232), despite his earlier statement that the Torah and Jewish religious law offer ethical values for media conduct (p. 221). This can be stated in a similar way also for Christianity and probably needs a deeper investigation.

With his study on Jews and Media, Cohen has made an important contribution to the field of Religion and Communication. One can only hope and wish that with this groundbreaking study the exchanges in the field will further develop, and grow. This example should stimulate also researchers from other Religions to enter the field as well. For Asia the concern and mission of the *Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC)* St. John’s University in Bangkok goes into the same direction.

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

Jonathan D. James, “**McDonaldisation, Masala McGospel and Om Economics – Televangelism in Contemporary India.**” New Delhi: Sage (2010). ISBN 978-81-321-0473-5 (HB). pp. 233.

This book is a serious and well-documented study on charismatic televangelism and its impact on the Protestant Churches and Hindu community in India. The title itself does not reveal it though a subtitle reads “Televangelism in Contemporary India.” Basing on the introductory pages, the aim of the book is “to investigate the influence of

charismatic televangelism in urban India in two settings: The Protestant Church and the Hindu community”.

Beside others, the book investigates and presents the following:

1. Televangelism and how it is rooted in Christianity’s history in India.
2. Critical aspects of Indian Christianity which are important on televangelism.
3. The study of charismatic televangelism in India today (p. xix)

The book studies globalization from a cultural and religious standpoint and Protestant Christian perspective. It also comes to insights of religion as a commodity but also seems to see mutual influences between Christian television programs and Hindu “televangelism” in applying the Christian expression also to similar attempts for Hindu programs.

The study is “based mainly on the views of the Indian (Protestant) Church and Hindu community leaders.” The author bases his research mainly on pastors of the Church but also leaders of the Hindu community. He applies an ethnographic approach with participant-observation, interviews and case studies. Main places for his studies are Mumbai and Hyderabad.

For Jonathan D. James, *McDonaldisation* is a “form pre-packaged externally imposed Christianity in today’s culture of consumer worshippers” (p. 2). *McGospel* related to American televangelism in India, thus, referring to a Gospel originating from the United States of America (p. 10). Masala has reference to the blending of Indian spices” which is also used by the Bollywood film industry: it refers to a combination with local tastes. The expression “Om” or “Aum” “is the fundamental symbol and syllable (sound) of Hinduism quoted in the Hindu Scriptures” (p. 14).

The author believes that “religion is yet a dynamic system that has left the borders of the nation-state and entered into the realm of globalization alongside economics, politics and culture” (p. 17).

James believes that post-colonial studies related to Christianity and Hinduism suggest to study the phenomenon of televangelism under the following perspectives (p. 19f.): (1) Political resistance to Christianity is prevalent in the form of restrictions to missionaries, missionary visas and overseas funding as well as anti-conversion laws in some Indian states; (2) Satellite and digital media have become the predominant media technology for the spread of Christianity...” (3) Majority of Indian Christians (50-60 percent) are Dalit... (4) Transnational Hindu televangelism has entered the scene ... (5) “Hindu televangelism, while rejecting the exclusive message of Christianity has used the methods, techniques and marketing strategies of charismatic televangelists to propagate the ‘new spirituality’ of Hinduism.

The author sees an influence of Hinduism on the charismatic televangelism movement similar to “new age” (p. 56f.)

For charismatic televangelism in India (p. 99ff.) he states that still 85% of the programs come from Western countries and only some 10% is produced locally. In the presentation of the programs, some 98% are straight preaching and in the messages are on “financial prosperity, wealth transfer, healing, success and miracles seem to predominate” (p. 106).

In analyzing two 24-hour Hindu channels, the author found the following: (1) 8 out of 10 programs are in Hindi or other vernacular languages, (2) 9 out of 10 programs are on “life skills” e.g. meditation, yoga demonstrations, breathing or stress reduction, (3) 8 out 10 programs show the priest or teacher seated in a yoga position and keeping all the times to that space...” (p. 123).

In responses to senior Christian leaders to the question “Is Hindu television imitating charismatic televangelism?” 45% answered “yes in

a big way,” and another 10% admitted “yes in a little way” (p. 180).

The author is convinced that “both charismatic televangelism and Hindu televangelism have created a new genre of the expanding television media market in India.” He expects that “other religions like Islam, Buddhism or even new religious movements and sectarian groups are likely to jump on the bandwagon to establish religious channels” (p. 213).

Concluding his book, Jonathan D. James calls for a bigger study as well as a new paradigm to understanding the changing patterns of mediated religion in the global world.” His book is an important contribution to this field of study. Though one might question the use of the word “televangelism” also for Hinduism and other religions where the second part of the word (e)vangelism refers really to genuine Christian expression, referring to the Gospel, might be missing.

The book is one of the very few studies on religion and media in Asia and even the author himself seems to be based in Australia and not in India or Asia.

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

Stig Hjarvard, Mia Lövheim, **“Mediatization and Religion. Nordic Perspectives.”** Göteborg (Sweden): Nordicom (2012). pp. 210.

This collection of ten research papers treats the interplay between Media, Religion and Culture in nordic countries . “In the last 20 years research into the nterplay between Media and Religion has become a significant area of academic interest”(p.6). This volume presents theoretical developments and empirical applications of theories relating to the role of Media in social change and religious transformation in nordic countries. The ten contributions are presented under the following headings: 1.Mediatization, Public Media and the National Church, 2.The Mediatization of Social Conflicts, 3. Religious identity and a changing Media environment, 4.Religion and Popular Media culture.(An extenisve Review follows in the next ARC Journal!)

“Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Islam.” Current Dialogue, No.52, July 2012. Geneva: World Council of Churches (2012).

This special issue of Current Dialogue is fully devoted to the “Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Islam” and continues the earlier publication of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on Buddhism (cf. ARC Journal, Vol. 10,2012 p.112!). The publication presents papers from an Islam Consultation of the WCC in Chavannes de Bogis, near Geneva, in October 2008. There are papers on “Living as a community with Islam”, “Lutheran Theology and Practice and some aspects of Christian Theologizing in Relation to Islam” as well as on “Historical and Political contexts of Christian-Muslim relations in Pakistan, Challenges to missiological and theological vocation”.

The publication can be found through the World Council of Churches website: www.oikumene.org

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