

## Catholic Social Communication as Witnessing to the Light in a Wounded World

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Pope Leo XIV, in the homily at his installation Mass on May 18, 2025, observed, “In this our time, we still see too much discord, too many wounds caused by hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of difference, and an economic paradigm that exploits the Earth’s resources and marginalises the poorest.”<sup>1</sup>

The words of the Church’s newly elected leader reminded me of the theme of the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word: *Your Light Must Shine Before Others: Faithful and Creative Disciples in a Wounded World*,” which took place in Nemi, Italy from June 16 to July 14, 2024. Soon after its Chapter, the missionary congregation also inaugurated the Jubilee Year on September 8, 2024 celebrating the 150th anniversary of its founding with the theme: “*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*.”

As a member of the Society of the Divine Word, these two events hold special significance for me. Therefore, in this essay, I will draw inspiration from these two themes to reflect on the purpose and nature of Catholic social communication in today’s world. The essay will consist of three parts: (1) Setting the scene—the wounds of today’s world; (2) Defining the nature and purpose of Catholic social communication; and (3) Proposing the key elements of Catholic social communication in a wounded world.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Leo XIV, “Homily, Installation Mass,” May 18, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250518-inizio-pontificato.html>.

## A Wounded World

First, I would like to begin by setting the scene for us—the scene of a wounded world. In the preparation for the General Chapter, local SVD communities throughout the world were asked to identify and reflect on the various wounds on a personal, communal, and global level. In the Final Chapter Document, there are a series of wounds listed:<sup>2</sup>

*Social and cultural wounds:* We live in a world marred by systemic inequities, pervasive prejudice, and the overwhelming tides of modern crises—human trafficking, fractured families, and the insidious spread of digital falsehoods. These wounds of our age not only thwart the pursuit of intercultural and interfaith harmony but also corrode the bedrock of traditional values and spiritual support systems. Stripped of these assurances, many people face a situation of social isolation and spiritual desolation, while succumbing to the allure of consumerism and the impact of secularization.

*Economic and political wounds:* We are inflicted by the deep scars of global inequalities, where unjust economic systems and the relentless exploitation of resources trample upon the rights and lives of indigenous peoples. Corruption and instability cast a heavy shadow causing governments to be paralyzed and communities deprived of the most basic necessities. Amid this turmoil, extremist violence and forced migration disrupt countless lives, leaving refugees in hardship, straining the resources of host nations, and fueling social discord.

*Physical and psychological wounds:* We witness innumerable situations where substance abuse, alcoholism, and other addictions erode personal and communal bonds. Trauma from violence and loss leads to widespread mental health struggles, while individuals with disabilities often endure silent suffering, facing both physical and emotional challenges in daily life.

*Environmental wounds:* These wounds result from industrialization and commercial exploitation, which lead to ecological disasters and climate crises. Deforestation, resource depletion, and chemical overuse in agriculture harm human health and the environment. Additionally, prolonged droughts and floods threaten food security, while water scarcity poses an existential threat for many communities.

*Wounds in the Church:* Moral failings of some of its members, including financial mismanagement, abuse of power, and sexual misconduct, lead to a loss of credibility and declining membership. Secularism and a perceived

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<sup>2</sup> Society of the Divine Word, *Documents of the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter* (Rome: SVD Publications, 2024), 16-19.

detachment of the Church from the lives of people exacerbate these issues, with declining vocations impacting pastoral work, especially in Europe and the Americas. Clericalism fosters an overemphasis on authority, which undermines the priesthood's true mission and limits lay participation. Additionally, ideological divisions create tension and discord within the Church community.

The wounds that afflict our world and Church today are not confined to any one region, community, or group. These pains cross the boundaries of geography, society, gender, and culture. They impact the lives of individuals and communities across the globe. In his homily at the Mass concluding the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on October 27, 2024, Pope Francis exhorted:

We cannot remain inert before the questions raised by the women and men of today, before the challenges of our time, the urgency of evangelization and the many wounds that afflict humanity. Sisters and brothers, we cannot afford to sit back. A sedentary Church, that inadvertently withdraws from life and confines itself to the margins of reality, is a Church that risks remaining blind and becoming comfortable with its own unease.<sup>3</sup>

## Understanding Catholic Social Communication

When we hear the term “social communication,” many of us think of various means of communication such as the internet, television, or the gadgets used in communication. While these are all essential instruments of communication, when we speak of Catholic social communication, we need to go to something deeper and more fundamental than the gadgets and media of communication. We go to the very notion of communication itself! And this deals with theology.

The concept of communication theology in its comprehensive understanding closely corresponds with other sciences, including social communication. This does not necessarily mean that in discussions about communication theology, which also covers social communication, the topic only covers communication media. The concept of communication theology, Franz-Josef Eilers remarked, “does not start with the media or technical means but rather with the center of theology, with God Himself. Communication does become the eye through which the whole of theology is seen because the Christian God

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Homily at the Mass concluding the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 27, 2024, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2024/documents/20241027-omelia-conclusioni-sinodo.html>

is a communicating God.”<sup>4</sup> The implication of this concept is that communication is brought into the center of theology, becoming a theological principle. Here, God is taken seriously as a communicating God and both Divine revelation and salvation are considered as communicative happenings. A logical inference within this understanding is that “communication theology considers the whole of theology under the perspective of communication.”<sup>5</sup>

Bernard J. F. Lonergan asserted that communication is a theological concern,<sup>6</sup> stating that “practical theology is concerned with the effective communication of Christ’s message.”<sup>7</sup> According to German theologian Gisbert Greshake, “Communication is from its origin a decisive theological idea which grounds in the Christian revelation, which addresses the centres of the Christian perception of God and of the world.”<sup>8</sup> Greshake espoused on the expression “communication” in the common use of the word, and also in philosophical perspective. The common use of communication, Greshake explained, is derived from the root word *mun*, which means something like that of a threshold or circumscription. This root meaning can be applied to a common room or place for living where everyone depends on everyone else.

The philosophical perspective is based on the Latin word *munus*, which means gift. The expression of communication then refers to the one who communicates as in service to others and passes on to them a gift through which both come into communion. These root words imply that communication is a process of mutual giving which ultimately results in “communion.” Greshake argued that this concept builds on the foundation of the “Trinitarian God who enters into the world and communicates Himself to human beings in Jesus Christ and in the Power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, what God communicates is not something but God’s very Self. Jesus Christ who had a direct encounter with human beings, is the self-communication of God. The Divine self-communication, however, happens primarily in the Trinity. Thus, God’s self-communication is the basis for a special communication theology.

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<sup>4</sup> Franz-Josef Eilers, “Communication Theology: Some Considerations,” in Franz Josef Eilers, ed. *Church and Social Communication in Asia: Documents, Analysis Experiences*. 2nd ed. (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2008), 174.

<sup>5</sup> Virgilio F. Ciudadano, Jr, *Social Communication Formation in Seminaries and Schools of Theology: An Investigation* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2015), 107.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 255.

<sup>7</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 362.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Anh Vu Ta and Franz-Josef Eilers, eds., *Social Communication in Theological Perspective: Communication Theology* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2015), 47.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Anh Vu Ta and Franz-Josef Eilers, eds., *Social Communication in Theological Perspective*, 48.

The notion of God's self-communication has been extensively developed by Karl Rahner to articulate how God reveals Godself to humanity through grace, culminating in the person of Jesus Christ, and to show that human beings are inherently oriented toward this divine self-revelation.<sup>10</sup> According to Karl Rahner, God communicates Godself as a person who is both gift and giver, embodying perfect love. In this self-communication, Rahner explained, "the giver in his own being is the gift," such that God's very being becomes constitutive of human existence through what he describes as a relation of formal causality.<sup>11</sup> Rahner remarked that "the term 'self-communication' is really intended to signify that God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man."<sup>12</sup> In other words, God doesn't just communicate information or blessings to us. God gives God's self to us, entering into our deepest core, and this relationship with God becomes part of our very identity as human beings.

## Elements of Communication Theology

As stated above, the mystery of God's self-communication is manifested especially through the Trinity, Revelation, and Incarnation.

Firstly, *Trinity*. Greshake characterized the Trinitarian God as follows: "God is the one who is not a static, lonely nomadic. Rather, God is in himself plural: Life, Love and Communio."<sup>13</sup> Thus, "God is those communio in which the three divine persons carry out the one divine life as mutual self-communication in the threefold interaction of love."<sup>14</sup> Within this circle of relationship, the Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit, who themselves possess the same Divine nature.

Through this moment, Franz-Josef Eilers noted, "The Father 'speaks' the Son and in so doing He generates and communicates everything He is and He has," and in turn, the "Son calls the Father and gives Himself in totality with perfect obedience."<sup>15</sup> In the same line of understanding, Carlo Martini wrote, "The intimate life of God as far as we can comprehend is a profound and on-going inexhaustible communication between the Divine persons."<sup>16</sup> In other

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 121

<sup>12</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Anh Vu Ta and Franz-Josef Eilers, *Social Communication in Theological Perspective*, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Gilberts Greshake, *Eine Trinitarische Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 179.

<sup>15</sup> Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating in Community: An Introduction to Social Communication* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2009), 46.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Eilers, *Communicating in Community*, 46.

words, there is an ongoing perpetual dialogue between the three divine persons.

Secondly, *Revelation*. The Christian understanding of God's self-communication is based on God's character as a God who relates and communicates with God's creatures. The Vatican II document on Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, states, "Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind" (DV 6). Therefore, the entire Scripture speaks about God as a communicating God—a God who shares and reveals Godself with God's creatures. The Old Testament shows the inner Trinitarian self-communication of God involved in God's dialogue with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This communicative action of God is also echoed in the New Testament.

The theme surrounding the Pentecost event, the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-47) is considered as God communicating yet again with human beings. The communicative occurrence of Pentecost is derived naturally from the Trinitarian communion of love. That is, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are unified in the circumference of Divine communication. The quintessence of God, as pointed out by Martini, in fact, is both "communion and communication."<sup>17</sup> The Pentecost event, therefore, signifies a precious moment of God's outpouring of the Holy Spirit which gives people a profound communicative ability. It was also a moment through which God re-initiated and restored the divine-human relationship, marked by the gratuitous outpouring of the same Holy Spirit.

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit filled each of the disciples with the gift of speaking in tongues. It gave them the ability to be understood in different languages spoken by people all over the world. In other words, Pentecost fulfills Jesus' promise and marks the birth of the Church, initiating its mission of communication, as the Holy Spirit empowers the disciples to restore true and authentic communication among humanity, overcoming the division caused at Babel.<sup>18</sup>

Pentecost, in this context, would be nothing but communication, and the main mission of the Church, therefore, is to communicate the gospel message in the here and now of every time. God's intervention through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost characterizes the Church which has been

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<sup>17</sup> Carlo Maria Martini, *Communicating Christ to the World* (Diliman: Claretian Publications, 1994), 21

<sup>18</sup> Anh Vu Ta, "Communication Theology for Pastoral Communication as a New Approach," *Asian Horizons* 5, no. 3 (September 2011): 454.

established by God's own self and that the Spirit, who commanded the disciples, enables the Church to communicate and bear witness to the gospel until the end of time. The gift of God's Spirit would give the Church of the contemporary age a new heart, a new language, and a new ability to communicate. Such is the fulfilment of God's enduring presence in our midst through the Church's life and proclamation of the Gospel.

Finally, *Incarnation*. The Biblical underpinning of the Christian communication is the Trinitarian communication. The Trinitarian communion shows an ongoing-permanent communication between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father communicates constantly to the Son and the Son, in total obedience, communicates everything of what He has heard from His Father to the world. The Logos (Son) communicated perfectly and successfully the message of the Father to the world and the people; and therefore, Jesus is known as the Perfect Communicator of God. Carlo M. Martini asserted:

In the Incarnation and in the paschal mystery we come to know the Son whom St. Ignatius of Antioch calls "the Word proceeding from silence." It is he in whom the Father (the Silence, the hidden mystery who is the origin of communication) expresses himself and makes himself known. In his whole life, Jesus did not want to do anything else as revealing the Father: "I have revealed your name to men" (Jn 17:6).<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Jesus' fundamental mission on earth was to reveal the face of the Father, in other words, to reveal to humanity God's love for the world. The author of the fourth Gospel affirms the biblical foundation of Jesus as the sole revealer of the Father, stating: "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is the Father's side, has revealed Him" (John 1:18). The source of Jesus' love for humanity comes from the Father's love through the Trinitarian relationship. The love of the Father thus becomes flesh in the Incarnation of the Son. The Father, who is love, sends the Word, a Word which communicates the love and the very self of God. As the sole revealer of the Father, Jesus does not simply communicate the concepts or ideas and instructions to His listeners. Jesus' communication indeed, as described eloquently by the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, is "more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level, it is the giving of self in love."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Carlo Maria Martini, *Effata "Apriti"; Il Lembo del Mantello* (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano di Documentazione e Studi religiosi, 1990), no.25.

<sup>20</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Communio et Progressio*, 1971, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_23051971\\_communio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23051971_communio_en.html), no. 11.

How did Jesus, as the perfect revealer of the Father, communicate this “giving of self in love” in His mission? The Gospel of Mark shows us the spiritual life of Jesus, in and through which, He revealed the love of the Father. “Rising very early before dawn, He left and went off to a deserted place, where He prayed” (Mk. 1:35). Other Gospel accounts relate that Jesus would solemnly pray before making important decisions in His life. This way of prayerful communication with the Father was taught to his disciples by Jesus as well (Mt. 6:9-15). In His profoundest belief, Jesus, through constant prayer, received the Love of the Father and thus received the spiritual nourishment for His mission to communicate the Good News to the people.

## Church as Communication

Avery Dulles, building on Karl Rahner’s profound thought on God’s self-communication, characterized Christianity as “first and foremost the religion of communication.”<sup>21</sup> This insight arises from the understanding that God, in the mystery of the Trinity, is a dynamic of self-giving love that reaches outward toward humanity.<sup>22</sup> As such, the Christian faith—centered on this self-revealing God—is inherently communicative, oriented toward sharing the divine life and the message of salvation with the world. This perspective underscores the fundamental role of communication in grasping both the nature of God and the core identity of the Christian faith. Because Christianity is a religion of communication, Dulles concluded that the Church is likewise communication.<sup>23</sup> Dulles envisioned the Church as “a vast communication network designed to bring men out of their isolation and estrangement and to bring them individually and corporately into communion with God in Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

Two approaches of communication theology, to expound the concept on a more practical level, are known as pastoral and evangelizing communication. Pastoral communication is the communication *ad intra* for the Christian community and the Church. The understanding of pastoral communication is part of pastoral theology which refers to the application of theology to the lives of people and society as seen and manifested in the preaching, catechetical,

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<sup>21</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (Dublin: Crossroad, 1992), 38.

<sup>22</sup> Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Church is Communication* (Rome: Multimedia International, 1972), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Avery Dulles, “The Church and Communication,” in Avery Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 110.

Biblical as well as the liturgical apostolates of the Church. The concept of pastoral communication, in fact, derives from the word “pastor” or the shepherd himself who shares with and relates to his flock using different methods, means, and contents in his communication. Within this framework, “pastoral communication is communicating for pastoral care, shepherding, building up, maintaining and deepening of faith.”<sup>25</sup> In a strict sense, pastoral communication is communication for and with the members of the Church. In a broad sense, it refers to all activities of the Church and its members.<sup>26</sup>

Evangelizing communication, on the other hand, is communication *ad extra* aimed at those outside the Church, especially those who have not been baptized or who have not known Christ yet. The Church exists not only for the community of believers but is also sent to share and proclaim the Good News to all the world. Thus, the way the Church carries out its mission with the people outside or at the margins of the Church reflects the endeavor to communicate the Kingdom of God beyond the narrow Church boundaries. Its fundamental concept lies on the “kerygmatic, proclaiming or missionary communication,”<sup>27</sup> in which dialogue is seen as an essential part. Dialogue, in the light of evangelizing communication, is “the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation. Any sense of mission not permeated by such dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teaching of the Gospel.”<sup>28</sup> The landmark document *Nostra Aetate* affirms the importance of dialogue with other religions as a way of evangelizing communication. This document provides a sense of prophetic imperative for Catholics to promote the spiritual values seen in other religious traditions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It also inspires a humbler, yet creative way to speak with integrity of what God has revealed to human beings. Although *Nostra Aetate* does not ignore the substantial differences between Catholicism and other faiths, the document attempts to give proper attention to the characteristics that the various religious traditions have in common.

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<sup>25</sup> Virgilio F. Ciudadano, Jr, *Social Communication Formation in Seminaries and Schools of Theology: An Investigation* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc.), 14.

<sup>26</sup> Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission: An Introduction to Pastoral and Evangelizing Communication* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2003), 34.

<sup>27</sup> Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission*, 210.

<sup>28</sup> Secretariat for Non-Christians, “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflection and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission,” quoted in Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission For Today* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2004), 378.

Catholic social communication, whether pastoral or evangelizing, serves a fundamental purpose: to foster human progress and promote genuine communion among people. As articulated in *Communio et Progressio* (1971), this mission seeks to accelerate all forms of human development and enhance co-operation until true fellowship is achieved.”<sup>29</sup> Communication in the Catholic tradition is not merely about transmitting information but about building relationships rooted in truth, love, and solidarity. Whether proclaimed from the pulpit, shared in the marketplace, broadcast over radio waves, or disseminated through digital platforms, its purpose remains unchanged—to cultivate unity, inspire mutual understanding, and bear witness to the Gospel in ways that speak to the heart of human experience.<sup>30</sup> In an era of deep social fragmentation and global crises, Catholic social communication continues to be a vital instrument for healing wounds, bridging divides, and fostering a more just and compassionate world.

## Catholic Social Communication in the Present Milieu

In the work of social communication, the Church through its various individuals and means has to continually discern the signs of the times and impart its wisdom that addresses contemporary concerns. Here, I propose six key elements involved in social communication. These six elements are not exclusive of one another but intertwining, often overlapping and reinforcing of one another. For the sake of brevity in this essay, I will only go through each element in a brief manner.

### Communicating Prophetically

In the 2023 World Communication Day Message, Pope Francis wrote, “I dream of an ecclesial communication that knows how to let itself be guided by the Holy Spirit, gentle and at the same time, prophetic, that knows how to find new ways and means for the wonderful proclamation it is called to deliver in the third millennium.”<sup>31</sup> In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the prophet stands as a voice of divine urgency—a bearer of messages not born of human will but inspired by God. To be prophetic was to walk a perilous path, speaking truth in times of denial and calling a forgetful people back to the heart of their covenant. Essential to the prophet’s mission was oftentimes an unwavering

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<sup>29</sup> *Communio et Progressio*, no. 73

<sup>30</sup> *Communio et Progressio*, no. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, WCD Message, 2023, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20230124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>

summons to repentance: a plea to abandon idols, to shun injustice, and to cleanse the moral decay that had taken root in the soul of the people. However, the prophet did not merely warn; he wept, pleaded, and proclaimed, often to an audience unwilling to listen. His words were edged with judgment but rooted in the hope of return. Jeremiah, among the most anguished of these voices, stood before Israel and foretold the bitter cost of unfaithfulness—the looming shadow of Babylonian exile (Jeremiah 25:1–14), not as punishment for its own sake, but as consequence and wake-up call.

Another significant aspect of prophetic activity was the advocacy for social justice. Prophets spoke out against oppression, exploitation, and inequality, reminding their listeners that true worship of God includes just and compassionate treatment of others. The prophet Amos was well-known for his denunciations of social injustice and his call for justice to “roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). Likewise, Isaiah declared God’s disdain for hollow religiosity devoid of ethical integrity. “Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow,” (1:17) Isaiah commanded.

While forthtelling—addressing present moral conditions and social realities—was a central task of the prophets, they also engaged in foretelling, revealing future events tied to God’s plans for judgment and redemption. These forward-looking messages were not detached predictions; they reinforced the urgency of repentance and highlighted the consequences of human actions. Prophecies about the coming Messiah, such as those found in Isaiah and Micah, offered hope of future restoration and salvation (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6–7; Micah 5:2). This dual function of addressing the present while pointing toward the future adds depth to the prophetic role, linking current behavior with long-term consequences and divine promises.

In today’s wounded world, prophetic communication continues to call for truth-telling, especially in the face of systemic injustice. It challenges structures of power and advocates for those pushed to the margins, reminding us that faithfulness to God includes a responsibility to seek justice and uphold human dignity. Pope Paul VI stated in the 1971 WCD Message, “the Church is conscious of being a prophetic sign of unity and peace for the entire world.”<sup>32</sup> This requires us to confront the root causes of suffering, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, and to call for a more just and equitable society. By drawing inspiration from the prophetic tradition, we can become agents of change, working towards a world where God’s love and justice prevail.

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<sup>32</sup> Pope Paul VI, World Communication Day Message, 1971, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_mes\\_19710325\\_v-com-day.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19710325_v-com-day.html).

## Communicating Faithfully and Creatively

In the SVD Chapter document, there is an emphasis on becoming faithful and creative disciples. Catholic communicators are first and foremost disciples. Witnessing to the Light has to stem from genuine faith. The vocation of a Catholic communicator is not founded on human wisdom or worldly power but on faith—faith in the truths received through Christ. We are called to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ with confidence, anchored in His promises.

The term “Light” in the Jubilee theme refers to none other than Christ, the Incarnate Word. Our witness must flow from this deep well of faith, led by the Holy Spirit, and grounded in the teachings of the Church and our personal relationship with Christ, who shapes our life, vocation, and mission. According to Father Superior General Anselmo Ricardo Ribeiro, “To become faithful disciples, we need to deepen our Trinitarian and missionary spirituality.” Moreover, he remarked, “Being a faithful disciple is a gift and task. It is a joyful and responsible vocation. Healing the wounds and bringing light to the world, portraying the Light of Christ express the commitment of a faithful disciple.”<sup>33</sup>

In his address to the SVDs on June 28, 2024, Pope Francis said: “All of the baptized are called to be missionary disciples, and fidelity to this vocation, always by the grace of God, is our commitment. Faithful disciples are recognized by the joy of the Gospel that lights up their face, from the way they live their life and thus transmit to others the love that they first received and continue to receive anew each day.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, it is imperative that Catholic communicators love both the Word of God *and* God of the Word. Particularly for the members of the Society of the Divine Word, it has been emphasized in the last two Chapters that “our name is our mission.” Incidentally, when Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, former President of FABC and archbishop of Yangon Diocese invited the SVDs to serve in Myanmar, he specifically wanted us to start a Biblical apostolate in his diocese, simply because we are the Society of the Divine Word. The mission imperative and direction is embedded in our name, as he saw it!

Effective Catholic social communication also needs to be creative. Creativity is necessary to connect meaningfully with a diverse, global audience facing unprecedented social and cultural changes. Despite the desire for connectedness, in our hyperconnected world, many people today feel isolated, disoriented, and detached from society, from traditional faith communities,

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<sup>33</sup> Society of the Divine Word, *Documents of the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter* (Rome: SVD Publications, 2024), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Society of the Divine Word, *Documents of the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter*, 70.

and the digital environment often heightens this sense of disconnection. Many marginalized groups such as undocumented migrant workers, political asylum seekers, and LGBTQ+ groups are forced to congregate in digital niches in order to have safe spaces for exchange and mutual support.

Creativity in communication allows faith communicators to engage with these individuals in ways that resonate, offering them a path to encounter Christ amid their doubts, desires, and everyday challenges. This is part of the synodal way in which the voices of all people are important, may they be expressed in meetings convened by the diocesan bishops or in digital spaces where there is no apparent authority figure. Only when the Church is willing to listen to all voices can it decipher accurately and fully the *sensus fidelium* of the People of God today.

In an age where information is instant and abundant, but truths are scarce, creative Catholic communication can break through the noise to present faith in a way that is both compelling and relevant. Pope Francis called on communicators to “search for an open and creative style of communication that never seeks to glamourize evil but instead to concentrate on solutions and to inspire a positive and responsible approach on the part of its recipients.”<sup>35</sup>

Fortunately, “examples of faithful and creative engagement on social media abound around the world, from both local communities as well as individuals who give witness to their faith on these platforms, oftentimes more pervasively than the institutional Church.”<sup>36</sup> However, in order to address the many wounds today, as Fr Ribeiro exhorted, we must “be active, vigilant, innovative, hardworking, searching for new answers, finding new paths.”

## Communicating as “People on the Ground”

In Vietnamese, there is an expression: “Riding the horse to admire the flowers.” It describes a situation in which someone moves quickly through an experience, seeing much but understanding little—engaging only on a surface level. Objectively, it may reflect a lack of access or opportunity for deeper engagement, resulting in a missed encounter with the substance, meaning, or transformative potential of the experience.

Subjectively, it can also point to a deliberate stance: a reluctance to get close, to invest time, effort, or emotional and intellectual energy in truly

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<sup>35</sup> Pope Francis, World Communication Day Message, 2017, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180124\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20180124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html).

<sup>36</sup> Dicastery for Communication, *Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media*, 2023, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/dpc/documents/20230528\\_dpc-verso-piena-presenza\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/dpc/documents/20230528_dpc-verso-piena-presenza_en.html), no. 2.

understanding a reality. In other words, they don't want to get their shoes dirty having to wade in the field.

In Thailand where I am working, Buddhist monks traditionally go into towns each day to collect alms. This daily ritual, which takes place in various contexts—bustling city streets, quiet rural villages, and lively market squares—not only provides monks with sustenance but also reinforces the close connection between the monastic community and laypeople. As monks walk in their saffron robes, the act of giving fosters mindfulness and reflection among donors, transforming the exchange into a moment of shared spirituality that embodies compassion and interdependence. Beyond the spiritual dimension, as they walk the roads, monks have the opportunity to observe the livelihoods and struggles of those they serve, particularly due to the impact of environmental degradation and societal changes.

Through this “on the ground” experience of witnessing the impacts of climate change, deforestation, and pollution on local landscapes and people's livelihoods, they can incorporate these urgent issues into their meditation and sermons. As people deeply embedded in the community and literally touching the ground of the earth with their bare feet, monks can also draw on local examples and cultural practices to make their messages relatable and actionable.

Communicating as “people on the ground” means speaking in a contextually relevant manner. Being a witness to the Light is not merely about proclaiming doctrine; it is about making the Light visible and transformative in the community we serve. This calls for us to engage with others in dialogue. In the first 59 WCD messages, there is a great emphasis on dialogue as an essential aspect of communication. The term has appeared 100 times in all the messages.

In the 2025 message coinciding with the Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis wrote, “The Jubilee reminds us that those who are peacemakers ‘will be called children of God’ (Mt 5:9), and in this way it inspires hope, points us to the need for an attentive, gentle and reflective communication, capable of pointing out paths of dialogue.”<sup>37</sup> In his address to representatives of the media a few days after his election, Pope Leo XIV reminded his listeners that “communication is not only the transmission of information, but it is also the creation of a culture, of human and digital environments that become spaces for dialogue and discussion. In looking at how technology is developing, this mission becomes ever more necessary.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, World Communication Day Message, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20250124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Pope Leo XIV, Address to Representatives of the Media, May 12, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250512-media.html>

Dialogue includes both listening and speaking. Pope Francis called for listening and speaking with the heart. He wrote, “We all have ears, but many times even those with perfect hearing are unable to hear another person. In fact, there is an interior deafness worse than the physical one. Indeed, listening concerns the whole person, not just the sense of hearing. The true seat of listening is the heart.”<sup>39</sup> The same disposition is also needed for speaking, especially speaking the truth in love, as St Paul exhorted Christians in his community to do (Eph 4:15). Thus, “We do not need loud, forceful communication, but rather communication that is capable of listening and of gathering the voices of the weak who have no voice,” said Pope Leo XIV.<sup>40</sup>

To effectively communicate with others, we need to be fully present, to be people on the ground, in order to be with others in their joys and sorrows, sharing in their lived experiences and fostering a genuine connection rooted in compassion and understanding. The document on social media engagement “Towards Full Presence” of the Dicastery for Communication says that full presence doesn’t have to be confined to physical space only. Presence can be achieved in digital spaces as well. More than ever, digital spaces have gained anthropological meaning because they are the places where people congregate and live out their lives—seeking companionship and friendship, making friends and creating enemies, engaging in debates and dialogue, committing sins and seeking forgiveness.

Catholic communicators, whether bishops, priests, or lay pastoral agents, need to be present in those spaces with the people in order to understand real world realities and make appropriate contextual responses to each particular situation. “Towards Full Presence” affirms that the faithful want Church leaders to be present to them in digital spaces and platforms.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, for many leaders and pastoral agents in the Church, when it comes to digital presence, too many are still riding horses rather than immersing themselves in the digital field where the people are gathering and living. For too many, these digital spaces are too messy, too chaotic, or too undignified for them to wade into from their highly respected ecclesial positions.

## Communicating to Inspire

In the homily in the Mass at the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Leo XIV declared:

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<sup>39</sup> Pope Francis, World Communication Day Message, 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20220124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Pope Leo XIV, Address to Representatives of the Media, May 12, 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Dicastery for Communication, *Towards Full Presence*, no. 1.

For our part, we want to be a small leaven of unity, communion and fraternity within the world. We want to say to the world, with humility and joy: Look to Christ! Come closer to him! Welcome his word that enlightens and consoles! Listen to his offer of love and become his one family: in the one Christ, we are one. This is the path to follow together, among ourselves but also with our sister Christian churches, with those who follow other religious paths, with those who are searching for God, with all women and men of good will, in order to build a new world where peace reigns!<sup>42</sup>

Catholic social communication as witnessing to the Light is about creatively inspiring others. The role of the speaker is not just to impart information but to become a transformative force that illuminates an eschatological perspective. Inspiring communication highlights and points to the vision of the future and bring to expression the new realities against the more visible ones of the old order. According to Protestant theologian Walter Brueggemann, “Energizing is closely linked to hope. We are energized not by that which we already possess but by that which is promised and about to be given.”<sup>43</sup> Energizing communication opposes the mindset that genuine transformation is illusory. By proclaiming transcendental promises and calling for radical shifts in attitudes and behaviors, Catholic social communicators can inspire communities to envision and work toward transformative futures. Proclaiming to inspire includes moving away from the status quo and presenting new visions that align with God’s plan of salvation.

Proclaiming the Good News about Christ, about His incarnation and His Paschal mystery, is aimed at inspiring people to recognise the possibility of a new heaven and a new earth—a completely new order, not just a rearrangement of the old. This requires a fundamental shift in attitude and behaviour, especially in our relationships with one another, indeed with all creation. Crucially, this involves fostering a culture of encounter, where genuine dialogue and mutual respect are prioritized. Pope Francis said, “Good communication helps us to grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity.”<sup>44</sup> In an age where the advance in communication technology increasingly causes individual isolation, group siloization, and social and ecclesial polarization, it is imperative that Catholic communication inspires people to live out the three fundamental relationships—with God, with fellow human beings, and with creation—in a more interconnected and holistic way.

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<sup>42</sup> Pope Leo XIV, “Homily, Installation Mass,” May 18, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250518-inizio-pontificato.html>

<sup>43</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (MT, Fortress Press, 2001), 14.

<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis, World Communication Day Message 2014, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140124\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html).

Whether in digital spaces or physical places, Catholic communication intentionally orients people “towards encountering real persons, forming real relationships and building real community.”<sup>45</sup> On a practical level, inspiring communication involves embracing diverse perspectives and empowering marginalized voices. Engaging with scientists and experts of various fields in an interdisciplinary manner enhances the credibility, effectiveness, and reach of Catholic communication. For example, when speaking on the subject of care for creation, Pope Francis paid particular attention to incorporating the voices of climate scientists, of Indigenous peoples, of influential figures from other religious traditions, and the groans of the Earth and the poor.<sup>46</sup>

Catholic social communication, in the synodal model, must adopt a “with” rather than “for” approach in addressing the wounds in the world. This means dialoguing with those most impacted by societal problems, especially women, children, and the poor. These vulnerable groups must be empowered to be part of the solutions rather than having solutions imposed on them without consultation.

## Communicating to Denounce or Challenge

The document *Ethics in Communication* declares, Christian communicators have “a prophetic task, a vocation: to speak out against the false gods and idols of the day—materialism, hedonism, consumerism, narrow nationalism...”<sup>47</sup> Catholic social communicators can use their voices to denounce negative realities, or in the words of the Asian bishops (FABC), “death-dealing realities”. Witnessing to the Light requires courage in confronting the dark realities of the world. This involves speaking truth to power. “Truth” here is the eternal truth of Christ—the person of Christ and the Gospel proclaimed by Christ.

Nowadays, we often hear things like “I’m speaking my truth,” or “She is speaking her truth,” or “You have the right to speak your truth.” I think this way of using the word “truth” is very problematic. If everyone has their own truths, then what is truth? Truth becomes subjective and fragmented, and holds no more weight than an opinion, thus losing its universal and transformative power. I understand that not all “truths” are created equal, and that there are various levels of truths, or “truthiness”. I also understand that individual

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<sup>45</sup> Dicastery for Communication, *Towards Full Presence*, no. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>47</sup> Vatican, *Ethics in Communication*, 2000, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20000530\\_ethics-communications\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20000530_ethics-communications_en.html), no. 31.

opinions are valuable and need to be respectfully heard. However, if we are not careful, this relativistic approach can undermine the pursuit of genuine understanding and justice, as it prioritizes individual perspectives over a shared foundation of moral and spiritual truth. In a homily in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI, just before his election to the papacy, said:

We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires. We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism. An 'adult' faith is not a faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth.<sup>48</sup>

Catholic social communicators, to use Pope Leo XIV's words, are "in service to the truth,"<sup>49</sup> and are called to rise above this subjectivity. Pope John Paul II remarked that "they have the duty and privilege to declare the truth—the glorious truth about human life and human destiny revealed in the Word made flesh."<sup>50</sup> They must courageously proclaim the objective truths of the gospel—truths that transcend personal opinions and provide a unifying vision for humanity. In doing so, they illuminate paths toward hope, reconciliation, and authentic freedom in a world often clouded by confusion and division.

This form of communication, especially in its prophetic manner, often involves speaking against the moral evil and apostasy of the world and societies. Central to denouncing communication is the imperative to confront structures of authority that perpetuate injustice and inequality. Catholic critics hold those in power accountable to moral standards derived from Catholic social teachings and universal human rights principles. They challenge narratives, policies, and practices intended to obscure, distort, and hide the truth while perpetuating inequality, marginalisation, oppression, and environmental destruction. In doing so, Catholic communicators uphold the Gospel values of justice, compassion, and solidarity, especially with the poor and vulnerable. The Nobel Peace Prize winner, journalist Maria Ressa, in her address at the Jubilee of the World of Communications on January 25, 2025, said faith communicators must "speak truth with moral clarity....Whether it's systemic racism, economic inequality, or the erosion of democratic norms, people of

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<sup>48</sup> Mass «Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice»: Homily of Card. Joseph Ratzinger, [https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice\\_20050418\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html)

<sup>49</sup> Pope Leo XIV, Address to Representatives of the Media, May 12, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250512-media.html>

<sup>50</sup> Pope John Paul II, World Communication Day Message, 2001.

faith must reclaim their prophetic voice. Demand transparency and accountability from those who control our public information ecosystems—from governments to Big Tech to media.”<sup>51</sup>

## Communicating through Witnessing Action

Communication takes place verbally and nonverbally. Therefore, witnessing to the Light always includes the witness of action. There is a familiar saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.” Of course, proclaiming the Good News through words is indispensable, but the life of the witness must be a living testimony of the gospel they preach. In many cultures, non-verbal communication plays a significant role in conveying a message. Therefore, gestures and actions often convey things that words alone cannot.

In the context of Catholic social communication, it is not just about the gestures but action. St Teresa of Avila pointed out that Christ no longer has a body but ours. Indeed, our eyes are the eyes through which He looks at each person with love and compassion. Our hands are the hands through which He soothes and heals the wounds of others. Our feet are the feet through which He reaches out to the poor, the forgotten by society, and the sinners who are lost.

Our everyday actions in choosing our mode of transportation when going about, the accessories we wear on our body, the electronic gadgets we own, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, and so on also possess tremendous communicative power that cannot be underestimated or overlooked. We saw this in Pope Francis’ visit to Southeast Asia in 2024. Pope Francis’ choice of a simple, everyday vehicle during his visit to Jakarta, Indonesia in September 2024 as part of his four country Apostolic visit to Asia reflected his commitment to a life of humility and simplicity. Rather than accepting the planned motorcade and luxurious accommodations offered by the Indonesian government, the pope opted to travel in a modest white Toyota Innova, a vehicle commonly used by the public and stayed at the Vatican Embassy instead of a high-end hotel.<sup>52</sup> And when he put out his arm to wave at the crowd, people noticed that his casio watch was a simple one that anyone could buy in a normal store. With

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<sup>51</sup> Maria Ressa, “Hope Comes from Action,” *Vatican News*, January 25, 2025, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-01/jubilee-of-the-world-of-communications-maria-ressa.html>

<sup>52</sup> Yustinus Paat and Mita Amalia Hapsari, “Pope Francis Rides Regular Toyota, Waves to Crowd from Open Window,” *Jakarta Globe*, September 3, 2024, <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/pope-francis-rides-regular-toyota-waves-to-crowd-from-open-window#:~:text=Pope%20Francis%20Rides%20Regular%20Toyota%2C%20Waves%20to%20Crowd%20from%20Open%20Window,-Yustinus%20Paat%2C%20Mita&text=Jakarta,Embassy%20in%20Jakarta%20on%20Tuesday>.

the eyes of the world following his every move, no doubt Pope Francis wanted this action to reinforce a broader message of living simply and rejecting excess, aligning with his teachings on being a “poor church for the poor,” caring for the environment, and promoting social equality.

In the homily delivered by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re at Pope Francis’ funeral Mass on April 26, 2025—before hundreds of world and religious leaders, tens of thousands of faithful in attendance, and millions watching online—he eloquently reflected on Francis’ tireless advocacy for the marginalized, his promotion of mercy and fraternity, his call for peace and environmental stewardship, his challenge to isolationism, and his embodiment of prophetic leadership. Few, if any, would deny that Pope Francis lived out these ideals as fully in action as he did in word.

Pope Paul VI wisely said, “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”<sup>53</sup> The goal of communication is to inspire and influence others, fostering a shared understanding and connection. The Greek term for “witness” is “martyr,” and many of the most influential figures in Christian history have been martyrs, whose profound commitment to God shines through their ultimate sacrifice. While martyrdom represents the highest form of Christian witness, all Christians are invited to live a life of self-sacrifice.

Christian discipleship is a calling that encompasses our whole being, allowing us to become channels for God’s love and living signs that point toward Christ.<sup>54</sup> Our witnessing action as communicative acts must be in the model of John the Baptist, that is, to point to Christ: “He must increase; I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). In the age of social media, for many people, being an influencer in words and deeds nowadays, are meant for self-promotion and for personal gains. Witnessing actions for Catholic communicators are not meant to gain “followers” and “engagement” for ourselves but ultimately, for Christ.

## Final Remark

To conclude, this is my final point. All Christians are one way or another social communicators. Whether we are giving a homily, teaching a catechism class, doing pastoral counseling, making a YouTube video, or posting a status on Facebook, we are at all times and every time speaking and acting as members of the Church.

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<sup>53</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html), no. 41.

<sup>54</sup> Dicastery for Communication, *Towards Full Presence*, no. 78.

As we reflect on the theme of the SVD Jubilee year—“*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*”—let us allow the Light of Christ to envelop us, guiding us in our mission as faithful and creative disciples of Christ. In our discipleship, we must communicate prophetically, faithfully, and courageously in order to contribute to the healing of the wounds of today’s world.