

Spirituality of Christian-inspired communication

A practical theological exploration. *By Hans Geybels*

Abstract Dieser Artikel ist ein Beitrag zur Spiritualität einer christlich-inspirierten Kommunikation. Anstatt theoretische Überlegungen anzustellen, wird der Geist der kommunikativen Handlungen Jesu analysiert. Das Ziel und die Techniken seiner Kommunikation sind untrennbar miteinander verbunden und dienen allesamt der Verkündigung des Reiches Gottes. Auf die Analyse der ganz eigenen Art Jesu zu kommunizieren folgen Konsequenzen für eine christlich-inspirierte Kommunikation in der heutigen Zeit: Damit eine christlich-inspirierte Kommunikation funktioniert, muss sie einige Schlüsselkriterien wie Offenheit, Authentizität, positive Wirkung, Respekt und Mitwirkungsmöglichkeit erfüllen. Nur die Formen von Kommunikation, die durch Spiritualität getrieben werden, sind in der Lage das Pfingstwunder greifbar zu machen. Authentische christliche Kommunikation bezeugt die in ihr lebende Botschaft Christi, was diese bewirkt und wie sie in die Welt verkündet wird.

In 1971, the first theology of communication emerged in the pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio*. That document appeared because the Council Fathers of Vatican II did not feel the need to dwell overmuch on communication. They merely issued a provisional decree, *Inter Mirifica* (1963), in which they tasked a special commission with issuing a longer document, which was duly published eight years later. Work on a theology of communication has progressed somewhat since then, but it still remains the poor relation among the numerous more established theological disciplines.

Compared to many other fields of theological research, the theology of communication is woefully underdeveloped, and it evidently follows that the spirituality of communication has hardly even been conceived (Rodriguez 2001 and Eilers). Therefore, I take spirituality of communication to mean a practical theological approach to communicating. At the centre is a single

*Prof. Dr. Hans Geybels
ist Professor für
Glaube, Kirche und
Medien an der Fakultät
für Theologie und
Religionswissenschaft
der Katholischen
Universität Leuven in
Belgien.*

question: how should a person who lives a life inspired by Jesus Christ communicate? It follows that we should first investigate how Jesus himself communicated. And although it seems almost unbelievable, even on this subject we encounter the same staggering lack of knowledge. While innumerable books and articles have been published about the historical life of Jesus, there is almost no information about how he communicated. The only available sources are fragmentary at best, for example citing his customary use of parables. In the most important reference works on the Bible and the *Leben-Jesuforschung*, communication is not even a lemma, let alone a well-developed theme.¹

The goal of Jesus' communications

Jesus' communication style is always focused on the goal of his mission. His mission is primarily to proclaim the Kingdom of God and all that it entails. In his own time, Jesus was often confronted with a splintered Jewry and divisions between people. He was acutely aware that division was the greatest risk to the realisation of his own goals and therefore unity (or community) played an extremely important part in his life and his teaching. That is how his shepherdship over the one flock must be understood (Jn 10,1-19), as well as his many parables about the Kingdom of God: it is one building with one foundation (Mt 16,18), one walled vineyard (Mt 20,1-11), one school of fish in one net (Mt 13,47-48), one company of guards (Mt 25,1-13), or the guests at one feast (Lc 14,7-24). Fracturing of the union is never tolerated (Lc 15,4.8).

In the Gospel of the beloved disciple, Jesus repeatedly insists on unity. He experienced this unity primarily between himself and his Father. He explicitly mentioned feeling at one with God (Jn 17,11-21), and this same unity is frequently apparent in his attitude towards God, which is characterised by love, trust, obedience, and understanding (Mt 11,25-27; Lc 23,46; Jn 5,19.30; 6,57; 10,30; 11,41 etc.). The unity with God is an indication of true love (1 Jn 4,13-17). The unity with God is articulated even better by referring to Jesus' prayer practice. His practice of frequent prayer shows his need for a union and a bond with his Father. He addresses God as *abba*, the customary word that

¹ In Dutch, there is Gevaert 2007. For English readers, Stein, 1994 is quite good. Specifically on the New Testament as communication: Reese 1984. In the context of media: Horsfield 2015.

children use to address their own fathers, like "papa" or "daddy". This was not entirely unusual at the time, but Jesus' use of the word is grounded in a highly unusual and unique understanding of himself. He feels like a Son. In the Old Testament, numerous Church Fathers and prophets experienced an intimate relationship with God, but never as intense or unique as what Jesus felt. He describes himself as the Son (Mt 11,25-27 and Lc 10,21-22) (Crump 2013, S. 686).

Healing

Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God in parallel with his concrete engagement with the needs of others. Most of the people he speaks with have spiritual or physical needs. At one point, he invites all who "are weary and are carrying heavy burdens" to listen to him (Mt 11,25-30). Individuals as well as entire groups call upon him. In the Gospels, people usually come to Jesus with physical problems. There is a direct link between Jesus' preaching on the one hand and his service as a healer/exorcist on the other hand. By the lake in Galilee, he combined teaching with healing and exorcisms (Mc 3,7-12 and Mt 12,15-21). Large groups brought sick people to him for healing. This is the context in which Jesus healed the cripple who was lowered down via the roof (Mc 2,1-12 par.), as well as the son of the centurion (Mt 8,5-13 and Lc 7,1-10). The healing miracles performed by Jesus were often a consequence of the great faith he found to be already present in the stricken, but in some cases, he performed miracles in order to inspire newfound belief (Wahlen 2013, S. 662-370 and Stenton 2001, S. 56-71).

Hope

Proclaiming the Kingdom of God is a story of hope. Christian hope is not a desire for personal wishes to be fulfilled. It is a hope that is independent of the vicissitudes of circumstance. The latter is the kind of hope that pessimists are able to extinguish with a dose of realism, but Christian hope has its foundations elsewhere. Paul writes: "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Rom 5,5) (König 2006, S. 253).

Commandments

A very important aspect of Jesus' communication are his commandments. His commandments are spread out across much of

the Gospel. It is rare to find a cluster such as the one in the so-called sermon on the mountain (Mt 5,1-12 and Lc 6,17-49). I explicitly choose the word commandments and not moral values or ethical rules, because the Gospels themselves use the Greek word *entolè* (commandment, order) (Kittel 1935, S.549-553 and Silva 2014, S. 199-207). With his moral precepts, Jesus is offering more than just suggestions or propositions. They are more like absolute preconditions, requirements to share in the Kingdom of God. He teaches his disciples that true faith has nothing to do with scrupulously following rules and laws, but it does require faith in action.

Technical aspects of Jesus' communication

Like in communication science, the goal of a message is the focal point around which a communication plan can then be developed. How can a person communicate effectively to achieve their purpose? Therefore, the communication methods Jesus used to proclaim the Kingdom of God and all that it entails must be investigated. His methods reveal much that we can still use today, two thousand years later.

Prayer as foundation

It is striking that when Jesus is about to say or do anything truly important, he first withdraws to pray. He prioritises absolutely the unity with his Father through prayer. Before he embarks on his public life, he retreats for forty days and nights into the desert in order to pray and fast. Matthew and Luke tell us that he was nearly starved by the end of this experience (Mt 4,2 and Lc 4,2). His experience equips him with the power of the Spirit (Lc 4,14). While in this profound union with the source of his being, he can then begin his mission in Galilee – and later most of Palestine. Prayer remains a constant throughout his public life.

The Gospels regularly mention Jesus praying, in the morning (Mc 1,35) and in the evening. Even after an exhausting day preaching to and feeding his audience, he withdraws to a mountain top so he can put the day to rest in prayer (Mc 6,46).

The Gospels report Jesus praying around numerous extraordinary and unique events throughout his public life. Just to name a few: after his baptism by John (Lc 3,21), after his early successes (Lc 5,16), immediately before choosing the twelve (Lc 6,12-13), pleading for his Father's aid with the sick asking to be healed (Mc 7,34), and finally on the cross (Lc 23,24 and 46).

He is a regular visitor to the temple (Mc 11,17 par.) and the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus considers both the temple and the synagogue to be houses of prayer (Mc1,21; Lc 4,16 and Ac 13,15).

Respect for the target audience

Jesus never talks over the heads of his conversation partners. But he never talks under them either, as in the case of Nicodemus. Nicodemus is one of the Jewish religious leaders of the Sanhedrin and has had an outstanding theological education (Jn 3,1-21). Of all the conversations recorded in the Gospel, the exchange between Nicodemus and Jesus is one of the most theologically and technically advanced.

When Jesus addresses large crowds of ordinary people, his tone tends to be direct and narrative. A direct style means that the speaker addresses his audience directly and in a clearly understandable way. Even the quite theology-heavy Gospel of John is filled with stories. In stories, the content is immediately insightful and unambiguous. This direct style can also be found in the so-called sermon on the mountain (Mt 5,1-16). Parenthetically, it is notable that Jesus chose to speak from a height, so that the crowd could hear him more easily.

His narrative style is most apparent in the numerous parables Jesus told. In the parables, Jesus did not provide immediate and unequivocal instructions around certain religious concepts (such as the Kingdom of God and the end of time), nor did he propose a code of conduct. Instead, the parables present a puzzle that requires wisdom and insight to be interpreted correctly. Precisely

Jesus' method is inductive. He always begins with the concrete and then derives the abstract. He incorporated the everyday into his parables.

because no concrete instructions or insights are offered, each listener can apply them in their own way to their own situation. The narrative structure also ensures that no blame is assigned, and no-one can be personally offended, and yet each person is invited to draw conclusions pertaining to themselves. Usually the realisation that the parable does indeed apply to oneself, comes quite suddenly, and it is not always a pleasant process. At one point, the chief priests, teachers of the law, and the elders in Jerusalem come to the realisation that Jesus meant the parable of the murdered vineyard owner's son as a criticism of them, and they attempt to have him arrested for it (Mc 12,1-12).

Jesus' method is inductive: He always begins with the concrete and then derives the abstract. Out of respect for his target

audience, Jesus always incorporated the everyday into his parables: a vineyard, a mustard seed, a farmer, a shepherd, a thief in the night, wise and foolish virgins, a full granary, wells... All of those things would have been eminently recognizable to his contemporaries, because they all hailed from either the rural or urban areas in first century Palestine. He linked the new and the radical with the familiar. This means he is never just telling meaningless 'stories'.

Telling stories is Jesus' most characteristic trait. Researchers have calculated that up to thirty-five percent of Jesus' teachings as reported in the synoptic Gospels take the form of parables (Blomberg 1990, S. 7). Jesus uses them so frequently because a parable is an effective tool to clarify something complicated or to deconstruct a polemic subject. Parables are quite disarming (Bruce 1983).

Positive and active tone of voice

If Jesus' message were not happy or positive, it could not possibly be known as the Good News. 'Good News' is a translation of the old English *godspel*, from god "good" and spel "story, message". The Gospels tell the story of God's eternal love and God's innumerable acts of love for humankind. A person must only answer "yes", as Mary did in the Magnificat. That answer will be answered in turn with everything a person truly and deeply needs, namely the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5,22-23). Jesus coupled the sharing of his message to healing people because the one cannot be without the other.² The concept of Christian communication cannot be led by what we believe people should hear, but should follow from listening to their needs. Sometimes they need nothing more than to know that they are loved.

Engagement

"Jesus wept." (Jn 11,34) It is the shortest sentence in the entire Bible. We do not tend to expect a 'Son of God' to succumb to such emotional outbursts in his communications. But that is precisely what Jesus does. His communication is never aloof or

² Paul says something similar (Ef 4,29): "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear."

detached. Quite the contrary. The emotion he most commonly displays, for example in the Gospel of Matthew, is compassion. Jesus has compassion for the crowds (Mt 9, 35-38; 14,13-21 and 15,29-39), and for the blind (Mt 20, 29-34). In the Gospel of John, love is the dominant sentiment. Love for his friend Lazarus (11,1-16), for a broken heart (Jn 13,18-21), his disciples (13,31-38), his Father (14,28-31), the beloved disciple (Jn 13,23; 19,26; 20,2 etc.). Jesus can become indignant with his own disciples (Mc 10,13-16) but what outrages him most of all is hypocritical religious practice (Voorwinde 2011). Jesus' sympathy is not just a bit of moral support, but truly experienced compassion. His anger is often no slight irritation, but can erupt into a full-blown fury. But the same is true of his joy and his love.³

The Scriptures invite Christians to be as engaged as Jesus was. They should rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep (Rom 12,15), and love one another deeply, from the heart (1 Pe 1,22). Engagement authenticates communication; makes it genuine. It establishes the truth of our neighbourly love.

Rhetorical techniques⁴

Classical rhetoric has produced numerous techniques used to persuade audiences. In Greco-Roman antiquity, a number of famous and less famous figures (Aristotle, Plato, Gorgias, and Quintillian) developed guidelines for persuading audiences. Aristotle and Quintillian devoted an entire handbook to it. Many rhetoricians, especially the Sophists (at least according to Socrates), had monetary gain in mind. But rhetorical techniques were not the sole province of the Greeks and the Romans. In many of Jesus' stories, many implicit rhetorical techniques are employed. New Testament specialist Robert Stein (1994) discovered ten different techniques used by Jesus.

The first technique is *asking questions*, rather than immediately providing the answers. This technique is very reminiscent

3 *Even God himself is accorded various emotions in the Bible. God is furious when speaking to Noah: "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created" (Gn 6,7). During the exodus from Egypt, God descends on Mount Sinai in a cloud of thunder and lightning and causes the people to tremble (Ex 19,16). See also the contribution by Franz-Josef Eilers.*

4 *Most of the rhetorical techniques are discussed in Stein (1994). In this section, I rely heavily on his work. On the same theme, also see chapter 4 (More than an aphorist. The discourses of Jesus) in Allison 2010.*

of Socrates on the agora, who only asked questions, making him a thorn in the side of the Athenian intellectuals, and at times greatly exasperating his conversation partners. The Bible is also filled with questions. Researchers (see Lewis 1987) calculated that the Bible contains 3,297 questions and Jesus asked 153 of them.

The famous parable about the Good Samaritan also ends with a question, after the Pharisees challenged Jesus to define who exactly counts as a neighbour: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (Lc 10,36). The example demonstrates that asking questions is not a gratuitous technique. The receiver must take a stand in formulating an answer. Jesus often tests his disciples in this way. A key passage in that regard occurs in Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asks: “Who do people say I am?” and soon follows up by challenging his own friends with the same question: “But who do you say that I am?” (Mc 8,27-31). On the way to Jerusalem, he will confront them even more intensely with their choice, when he asks whether they will be able to drink the cup that he drinks (Mc 10,38).

A rhetorical question is not a quiz question. An answer is not expected for a question like “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?” (Mt 7,9-10). When Jesus asks such questions of his disciples or his listeners, he does not expect a logical answer or additional information, but rather a change in behaviour. Jesus aims to bring about an existential change or personal development in his listeners (Gempf 2003, passim).

Exceptionally, Jesus used the question technique in a polemic way, when he is dealing with opponents who he knows are not open to his spiritual teachings, and who are only interested in entrapping him, as in this scene set in an unknown location: “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property, without first tying up the strong man? Then indeed the house can be plundered.” (Mt 12,26-29)

Jesus used the question technique in a polemic way, when he is dealing with opponents who he knows are not open to his spiritual teachings.

A second rhetorical technique used by Jesus is the *overstatement* or *hyperbole*. The literal meaning of these utterances is impossible or paradoxical and yet every listener will understand the point being made. When Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious authorities, he calls them “blind guides”, who “strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” (Mt 23,24). A better known example is that of the log and the speck of sawdust, in which he sharply criticises judgemental attitudes: “Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” (Mt 7,3). Phrases using the speck and the log have become idiomatic expressions in many languages and that is entirely due to Jesus’ use of hyperbole. An exaggeration like that lingers in the public consciousness. Another famous example is Jesus’ widely known statement that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God (Mc 10,24b-25). That message is clear and memorable.

A third technique is *punning*. Puns display creativity and a sense of humour, and are therefore – like hyperbole – very memorable. The Gospel contains many such inventions by Jesus, but they have become rather inaccessible to us, as Jesus spoke

Aramaic. In order to understand a good pun, it is necessary to be familiar with the language. The previously mentioned example with the gnat and the camel is a perfect illustration. In Aramaic, a gnat is a *galma* and a camel a *gamla*. A second example comes from the

erudite conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (Jn 3,8). The Aramaic words for ‘wind’ and ‘spirit’ are the same: *ruha*. The deeper spiritual meaning of this statement becomes clear: the *ruha* blows wherever it pleases, and so it is with everyone born of the *ruha*.

Further techniques Jesus used were *similes* and *metaphors*. They are explicit comparisons between things that are fundamentally different. The element of surprise from an unexpected comparison, makes for quick understanding and memorability. In the Gospels, the similes are easy to spot through the use of words such as ‘like’ and ‘as... as’. Jesus tells his disciples he is sending them out “like sheep into the midst of wolves”, and they must therefore be “as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves” (Mt 10,16). To explain his death and resurrection, he compares it

Further rhetorical techniques Jesus used were similes and metaphors; they are comparisons between things that are fundamentally different.

to the experience of Jonah in the belly of the whale (Mt 12,40). And he rebukes his disciples that if they only had faith as small as a mustard seed, they would be able to command a tree to move (Lc 17,6). For their ritualistic and hypocritical religiosity, he compares the Pharisees to whitewashed tombs: outwardly appearing shiny and beautiful, but inwardly filled with unclean rotting remains (Mt 23,27).

Similes are closely related to metaphors, which also compare two different things to one another. While the comparison is made explicit in a simile (“The eye is like a lamp for the body”), the metaphor is implicit (“The eye is the lamp of the body”). The Gospels are rife with examples: “Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” (Mc 9,50). And elsewhere: “You are the light of the world.” (Mt 5,14-16). Jesus often uses metaphors to describe himself: “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6,35), “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8,12), “I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn 15,5).

Sixthly, Jesus uses *proverbs*. Proverbs are also easy to understand and quite memorable. They are usually short witty phrases with a pithy message: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be” (Mt 6,21), “All who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Mt 26,52)

Furthermore, Jesus uses *riddles*. We tend to associate riddles with children’s games, but in antiquity they were considered a serious genre, useful for transferring wisdom. This significance is evident from the fact that many riddles are about the nature of the Kingdom of God and the nature of Jesus’ mission. The element of *disclosure* adds an additional mnemonic element. A well-known riddle told by Jesus, which also illustrates the seriousness of the format, include: “I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.” (Mc 14,58) Another easy to retain format is the paradox, a statement that appears to contain a contradiction. It is paradoxical for Jesus to claim that whoever among his disciples wants to be the greatest must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all (Mc 10,43-44).

Jesus also uses a fortiori: In an argument of this narrative form the conclusion follows with even greater logical necessity than the already accepted premises.

Jesus also uses *a fortiori*: “a yet stronger reason”. In a *fortiori* argument the conclusion follows with even greater “logical” necessity than the already accepted premises. One example

illustrates God's concern for humans: "And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?" (Mt 6,28-30)

Finally, Jesus uses *humour*, more specifically *irony*. Christianity has developed into a very serious religion and has lost touch with the sense of humour of its founder. In fact, comedy in religion is crucial on many levels and it has great relevance in the present day, for example because it lends a sense of perspective that is essential for deradicalisation (Geybels/Dillen 1997 and Geybels/Van Herck 2011). Irony in particular is useful for delivering a hard-hitting message in such a way that nobody feels personally victimised or offended. Because of the earnest interpretations of the Gospels throughout history, Jesus' masterful use of irony has become almost inaccessible to us. A little known utterance, but a beautiful illustration of Jesus' irony, is his answer to the Pharisees and the Sadducees when asked to perform a miracle:

"He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." (Mt 16,2-3).

It is tragic but at the same time amusing that the Pharisees and Sadducees know so much about religion, and yet are unable to understand Jesus' words and actions.

As shown Robert Stein (1994, S. 7-32) limits his list to verbal techniques, but Jesus' use of non-verbal techniques is equally important. In some passages in the Gospel, Jesus' silence speaks much louder than his words. When Jesus is summoned to appear before Pilate and is condemned by the crowds shortly afterwards, his silence highlights who the true prisoner in the situation is. Is it not Pilate, who is well aware that he has no good reason to condemn Jesus and who is increasingly overpowered by the people's demands to "crucify Him"? Has not Pilate truly lost his freedom as he gradually realises he is no more than a pawn to the Jewish religious authorities?

Discovering Jesus' non-verbal communication requires a very subtle reading of the Scriptures. But this reading speaks volumes about Jesus' true nature. Prior to the scene with Pilate, Jesus is captured in the olive grove. The three disciples that he has asked to keep watch have fallen asleep. When Jesus sees his attackers approach in the distance, he wakes the three and says: "Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." (Mc 14,42) Jesus does not flee, but rather goes to meet his betrayer. That subtle example of non-verbal communication shows that Jesus remains lord and master over what happens next. What occurs, occurs as he wishes it to. Even in great danger, Jesus retains his own freedom of action and speech.

Jesus speaks with authority

We know next to nothing about Jesus' life before he began his public existence as a travelling prophet and healer. The Gospel of Luke contains only one extraordinary tale about the early life of Jesus: when his parents found the 12 years old in the temple among teachers after three days missing him. "And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." (Lc 2,47). This tale by Luke reveals perhaps the most important aspect of Jesus' communication. This element could perhaps be considered part of Jesus' *tone of voice* (as discussed above), but it encompasses so much more. It is important enough to merit a separate discussion: Jesus' authority, which cannot be separated from his authenticity.

Nowhere in the Gospel does Jesus explain or give any reason why he should be above the law, or how he has acquired this authority. The secret of his authority lies in the authenticity of his way of life and the claims he makes for himself. Especially the latter is surely questionable. Imagine the words "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14,6) spoken by anyone else; we would surely assume we were dealing with a person who was either deranged or arrogant? On top of making such outrageous statements, Jesus also appropriates several magnificent political and religious titles for himself, such as Messiah, Son of God, and Son of Man (Kreplin 2011, S. 2473-2516).

If you piece all of that together, the only obvious conclusion is the one reached by Clive Staples Lewis. This person must be "a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord" (Lewis 1956, S. 52-53). All through

The secret of Jesus' communication is his authority: People have accepted his powerful declarations and personal claims.

the ages, people have chosen to believe the latter, and this is all down to Jesus' authority, the secret to his successful communication. People have accepted his powerful declarations and personal claims (including being the Son of God!) because of his authenticity, because of the fact that in Jesus' life, his words and his actions were one and the same. In technical terms: identity and message coincided completely. And when the identity of a messenger and his message coincide completely, then the perception that the receivers have of the messenger – his image – also conforms entirely to reality.

Conclusion

A Christian's responsibility to communicate is quite overwhelming, as the ultimate subject is Jesus himself. If a Christian communicates in a negative or reactive way, the receiver of the message will assume that Jesus was an irritating doomsayer or a fool. On the other hand, if a Christian communicates in a positive and active way, their listeners may become attracted to Jesus.

Following Jesus' example in communication means leaving one's comfort zone. Jesus did not just extol the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (and even that story was quite revolutionary); many of his statements were polemic. He rebuked the religious authorities for their hypocritical behaviour, which ultimately cost him his life. Even the audience at his very first public appearance in the synagogue of Nazareth wanted to kill him (Lc 4,28-29). He consorted with prostitutes, sinners, and collaborators. He left his home and his family to travel and proclaim the Kingdom of God wherever he went. He spoke with a certain urgency and did not tolerate procrastination; the wealthy youth was given only one chance. Christian-inspired communication can make a real difference, as long as it is based in experience and can touch, raise up, inspire, and motivate people. The insights that come with true engagement are perhaps the best suited to achieving the purpose of Christian communication: a transformative process leading to the realisation of the Kingdom of God.

Christian communication should either be authentic or not be at all. It is crucial that our words are backed up by our actions. Jesus as a person coincided completely with his message, and there was also no difference between his true identity and

Christian-inspired communication can make a real difference, as long as it is based in experience and can touch, raise up, and motivate people.

his projected image. In contemporary terms, this is known as complete transparency. A spiritual connection with Jesus is essential to Christian communication. All the values of Christian communication (truthfulness, honesty and sincerity, authenticity, etc.) flow from the source of a spiritual connection with God. Like in a marriage where the experience of values such as fidelity and mutual support are carried by love.

This spirituality also underpins one final important aspect. Communication that originates in concrete personal or professional situations is infinitely more powerful than purely theoretical analysis (the latter is of course still required, but it is not the field in which Christians can offer added value). Whoever takes a concrete situation and does not get theoretically detached from it, will be more easily heard and understood. Christian communication, in this day and age – that is so often characterised by need and suffering – cannot permit itself the luxury of being noncommittal.

Christians cannot possibly remain passive observers of the phenomenon of communication. Communication is genetically encoded in the mission of Christians and to embrace it requires a double transformation: a transformation of mentality about communication, and a transformation of the heart, to become more sensitive to the possibilities of communication. Regarding the first aspect: Christians must learn to interact in a positive and active way with everything that communication technology has to offer. Regarding the second aspect: there should be no distinction between communicating as a Christian and living as a Christian.

Literature

- Allison, Dale C. (2010): *Constructing Jesus. Memory, Imagination, and History*. Grand Rapids MI.
- Blomberg, Craig (1990): *Interpreting the Parables*. Downers Grove IL.
- Bruce, F.F. (1983): *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*. Illinois.
- Crump, David M. (2013): *Prayer*. In: Green, Joel B. (Hg.): *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels. A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*. Nottingham, S. 684-692.
- Eilers, Franz-Josef (2016): *Communication Spirituality for a "New Culture"*. <http://www.fabc.org/offices/osc/pdf/Spirituality%20of%20the%20Christian%20Communicator.pdf> (zuletzt aufgerufen am 10.8.2016).
- Gempf, Conrad (2003): *Jesus Asked: What He Wanted to Know*. Grand Rapids.
- Gevaert, Géry (2007): *Jezus als communicator*. Antwerpen.

- Geybels, Hans/Dillen Annemie (Hg.) (1997): *Jeezes da's een goeie. Humor en christendom*. Antwerpen.
- Geybels, Hans/Van Herck, Walter (Hg.) (2011): *The Redemptive Power of Religion. Challenges and Ambiguities*. London/New York: Continuum.
- Horsfield, Peter (2015): *From Jesus to Internet. A History of Christianity and Media*. Chichester.
- Kittel, Gerhard (1935): *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. Stuttgart, S. 549-553.
- König, Adrio (2006): *Die groot geloofswoordeboek. Meer as 500 kernwoorde van die Christelike geloof maklik gemaak*. Stellenbosch.
- Kreplin, Mathias (2011): *The self-understanding of Jesus*. In Holmén, Tom/Porter Stanley E. (Hg.): *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. Leiden/Boston, S. 2473-2516.
- Lewis, C.S. (1956): *Mere Christianity*. London.
- Lewis, Ralph L. (1987): *Proclaiming the Gospel Inductively*. In: *Review and Expositor*, 84. Jg., H. 1, S. 40-52. <https://www.gci.org/files/Proclaiming%20the%20Gospel%20Inductively.doc> (zuletzt aufgerufen am 1.11.2016).
- Reese, James M. (1984): *Experiencing the Good News*. *The New Testament Communication, Good News Studies*, 10. Wilmington DE.
- Rodriguez, Amardo (Hg.) (2001): *Essays on Communication & Spirituality. Contributions to a New Discourse on Communication*. Lanham MD.
- Silva, Moisés (Hg.) (2014): *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Grand Rapids MI, 2. Jg., S. 199-207.
- Stein, Robert H. (1994): *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings. Revised Edition*. Louisville/London/Westminster.
- Stenton, Graham (2001): *Message and miracles*. In Bockmuehl, Markus: *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*. Cambridge, S. 56-71.
- Voorwinde, Stephen (2011): *Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels*. New York NY.
- Wahlen, Clinton L. (2013): *Healing*. In Green, Joel B. (Hg.): *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels. A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*. Nottingham, S. 362-370.