PREACHING OF JESUS VIS-À-VIS LASSWELIAN THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Mediation is generally a terrestrial element. In heaven, we will see God face to face through the beatific vision. There will be no mediation because we will be there face to face with God. However, in our present life, it has pleased God to reveal himself to us in a mediated way. He has done this through different means which we call medium of God's communication to the human person. This mediation happens in the context of the world – in the existential categories of life. Mediation takes place in this world – in our daily experiences. This agrees very much with the existentialism of Heidegger but without neglecting the transcendental categories of Kant.

Keywords: Mediation; transcendental; dogma; preaching;

INTRODUCTION

As a preamble, it would be good to look at the general understanding of the Lasswelian theory. The theory indicates that in the process of communication, there is the sender who sends the message. The sender encodes the message. The sender alone does not complete the process of communication. There is also the recipient or the receiver of the message. The sender sends the message to the receiver. The encoded message is decoded. This means that the process of communication involves encoding and decoding.

Nevertheless, if the message is to be sent and received, there is need for the medium that connects the sender and the receiver. Once the message is received on the other end, there is usually a response. This response ends in some form of feedback as well. This means that in the process of communication, the roles of the sender and the receiver are not permanent. These roles keep shifting. The sender becomes the recipient and visa-versa. This paper would like to look at the preaching of Jesus and see how we could apply the Lasswelian theory to it. Basically we will be looking at Jesus as the sender, the human person as an active recipient, the effect, response and feedback. Specifically, we will situate the paper around the medium of communication that Jesus was using.

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Mediation is generally a terrestrial element. In heaven, we will see God face to face through the beatific vision. There will be no mediation because we will be there face to face with God. However, in our present life, it has pleased God to reveal himself to us in a mediated way. He has done this through different means which we call medium of God's communication to the human person. This mediation happens in the context of the world – in

the existential categories of life. Mediation takes place in this world – in our daily experiences. This agrees very much with the existentialism of Heidegger but without neglecting the transcendental categories of Kant.

What we mean here is that God is transcendental while the human person lives in the historical and existential categories – in the world – Rahner's 'spirit in the world.' The bringing together of the existential and the transcendental is the context of God's and human communication. God in his transcendentality self-communicates himself to the human person who lives in his or her historical and existential categories of existence. The communication in this case is that the transcendental comes to the historical so that the historical can share in the life of God.

The transcendental does not only remain in itself but empties itself so that the historical can share in the divinity. The communication between God and the human person happens through the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Verbum and Word of the Father. Once Jesus was born, he grew up in a culture, in a context and in a village. He learnt their language, their ways of doing things, their images and symbols.

That is why when he grew up; he progressively became conscious of his divinity. It is in this culture and context that Jesus learnt about the right medium that he could use in order to teach about the kingdom of God. He learnt about the stories, the parables, the folktales and the different ways in which the word of God could be communicated to the people of God.

That is why, when he began teaching and preaching, Jesus was a story teller. He told parables in order to communicate the word of God. He used parables so that people would easily understand the mysteries of God. Jesus knew that the mysteries of God told in their abstract manner would be difficult for the people to understand and comprehend, probably that is why he would use stories to present in a pictorial manner the mysteries of God. All this finds expression in theological anthropology where emphasis is placed on the fact that the theological and the anthropological are united in Jesus.

We also emphasize the two dimensions of descending and ascending Christology. Both aspects are important in preaching and in the communication of the good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus in his preaching used the technique of cross-mapping of concepts. This basically means that a difficult concept can be explained by using a simpler concept. A mystery can be explained by using a concept that is found in the historical or cultural setting.

For example, the mystery of God's love – a higher concept – was explained by a lower and simpler concept of the love of the father to the prodigal son. There is here cross mapping from the mysterious concept of God's love to a lower concept of the love of the father to the prodigal son. This is a theory that is very much promoted by scholars like *George Lakoff.* Through the cross-mapping of concepts, Jesus was able to explain difficult and mysterious things concerning the life of the Holy Trinity. He equally cross-mapped the difficult concept of how God looks for the sinners with the simple concept of a shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep. He cross-mapped the concept of how God created the world with the simple concept of the parable of the sower. All this Jesus did in order to explain difficult things by using simple images, concepts, stories and parables.

Jesus preached and sent his message to the hearers through the medium of stories and parables. The importance of the use of stories in the preaching ministry cannot be overlooked. The use of stories evokes emotions in the people that are listening.

That is why in the study of rhetoric; one of the important aspects is that of pathos which basically refers to the evocation of feelings and emotions. Stories that are taken from

the daily lives of the people and using the lives of the people evoke feelings and emotions. It is in this context that people find themselves attracted not only to the ending of the story, but the people are also interested in the progress of the story. There are so many stories that can be told traditionally and locally, and every culture has its own stories.

For example, in my culture there are so many stories about hunters, stories about creation, stories about hyenas, stories about mice, stories about friendships and so many other stories which evoke emotions in the listeners when they are told in public.

That is why preaching and communication of the good news when accompanied with stories leaves a long-lasting mark. This is very clear in the life, ministry and preaching of Jesus Christ where we clearly see that he used stories and parables a lot in preaching. For example, some of his wonderful parables include the parable of the Sower, the parable of the tenants, the parable of the lost coin, the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the prodigal son and the parable of the ten *virgins*. Jesus was a great storyteller who told stories with precision but also with surprising frequency.

That is why, even though he preached only for three years but he was able to raise so many followers and he was able to gather around himself so many people that would come to listen to him. Jesus was able to send the message to his listeners and stimulate the intended response.

Applying the Lasswelian model, we can say that as a sender of the message, Jesus was effective because he was able to get the kind of response that he intended. The stories were the medium through which he communicated and passed on his message, and he would get the desired effect even though in some instances the feedback was not in the affirmative. For example, when Jesus told his followers to take his body and to drink his blood, some of his followers agreed which means their response was in the affirmative but there were also instances when the response was not affirmative and the same pericope shows how some of this disciples walked away when Jesus had told them not only to take his body but also to drink his blood. In both instances, there was feedback which was affirmative and also response that was not affirmative.

The prospect of the non-affirmative response does not mean that Jesus was ineffective in communication but just that some people did not agree with what he was saying. While communication, at times, is aimed at convincing but at times, it is also informative and in terms of the informative element, we would go on to say that Jesus was effective and efficient in his communication. As a sender of the message, he would use the medium of stories, to the sender, he would stimulate a response and this was basically feedback.

Jesus was also using gestures in the process of communication of the good news. The gestures of Jesus also stimulated a response. The use of gestures is an important and vital instrument in the conveyance of the Good News. In this case, the sender uses the medium of the gesture to send the message to the recipient who responds and gives feedback.

In some instances, the gesture is used separately but in some instances the gesture is used together with the words – in which case there is spoken word which is verbal communication and the unspoken word enveloped in the gesture – and this is non-verbal communication. There were thus situations when Jesus used verbal communication and non-verbal communication. In both cases, there was a sender, the medium, the recipient, effect and feedback.

Jesus used several gestures in his preaching ministry, for example, he would touch the sick and heal them. Touching someone is a gesture – and depending on how you touch

someone, it could be a gesture of love, a gesture of anger, a gesture of pleasure, a gesture of intimacy, a gesture of caressing, and a gesture that expresses hate. The mode and way of touching – or of gesturing means a lot and says a lot. Jesus would touch the sick, he would mix mud and saliva and put it on the affected area and the person would heal – in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus would extend his hands to heaven, probably in the same way Moses did on the mountain as the Israelites fought in the war. When Moses raised the hands, the people won but when he dropped the hands, the Israelites would begin losing in the war. Jesus gestured in order to perform an action of healing. He would gesture to restore life. As such, we would say, Jesus would use the medium of gesturing in order to get the desired response and effect. The result and feedback in some instances is that the healed person would decide to follow Jesus.

Gestures are good in communication. They foster and add weight to the communication process. If the same words were said without a gesture, the effect would be completely different if the words were combined with the gestures. Some people are good at using gestures to communicate while others need both – gestures and words. A combination of the two is usually effective and efficient in passing on the message. Some gestures are broad while some gestures are modest.

Whichever gesture one uses depends on the situation, the context, the person involved and in some cases the recipient involved. While watching the political campaign speeches, one cannot but be surprised and even contented with the wide use of gestures. All that is done so that the politician can convince and put forward an idea. That is what Jesus did. He used gestures to convey his message.

Apart from using gestures, Jesus used many other forms of communication and medium which helped the people to understand. Most of these forms and medium of communication fit into the Lasswelian theory of communication which includes the sender, the recipient, the medium, the feedback and effect- this can also be described with the; who says, to whom, in which medium, with what effect and we of course can add, with what feedback. It is in this context that we can say that Jesus' preaching very much fits into the Lasswelian theory of communication.

The forms of communication in the teaching and preaching of Jesus can also be linked to the symbolism not only of Jesus' teaching but also that of scriptures in general. That is why we will look at symbolism in general in the teaching of Jesus but mainly by making reference to the Church.

There are different images and conceptions that describe the Church. For example, "the Church is the 'mother' without whom one could not have God the Father, the one Ark of salvation, the Bride of Christ, the new Eden and the Queen who stands by the side of the Saviour."[1] The Church is the persisting presence of the Word and by saying that, we mean that the symbolic function of the Logos in the world, and the self-communication of God is now continued through the Church.

We notice that when there is a free decision on the part of the symbolised, that it can be proclaimed or symbolized by the symbol, then the very nature of the symbolic reality in this case demands the juridical composition of the symbol and its free establishment. In other words, a symbol, which is a completely human one, is expected and demanded of it, to be of juridically determined nature, because of its social and existential dimension. A non-existent reality is incapable of expressing itself in this free and juridically determined way,

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[1] Karl RAHNER, *Dogmatic notes on 'Ecclesiological piety,'* in Karl RAHNER, "Theological investigations, Volume 5, Later writings," London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, 336.

because here, the symbol has the dimension of being a symbolic reality that renders present the symbolised being.

In doing so, the symbol realises itself, because 'it passes over into the "otherness" of the symbol.

Applying this, we can say that God renders Himself present in the freely constituted symbolism of the Church, which is formed on social and juridical lines. The fact that a symbol is a social and juridically constituted reality is not an objection to the presence of symbolic reality as such.

In this regard, we can give an example of two spouses who give their yes to each other before their legitimate authorities, be it civil or ecclesiastical. The yes that is exchanged between these two spouses is a symbolic reality, even if, it is spoken freely, and within certain juridically determined formalities. This consent is audibly expressed and has the effect of bringing about the permanent marriage bond between the two spouses and without this yes, the marriage bond cannot be realised.

As such, we can conclude that the audible expression, and that which it expresses, are related in the same way that the body and soul are related. The expression and the thing expressed are interdependent and form an inner unity.

From this example, we see that the audible yes expressed is a symbol through which the marriage bond is realised and yet, this symbol is freely and juridically constituted. With this example, we can hereby demonstrate the fact that "whether a *"signum" (arbitraruim)* is a symbolic reality or the merely extrinsic representational symbol of a reality, cannot be decided by the mere fact that it is arbitrary.

In fact, this characteristic of being an arbitrary symbol or being juridically constituted, may be demanded by the nature of the thing that is being symbolised, and that in no way is this detrimental to the symbolism. The Church is a reality that is tributary to the Spirit, is an entity and a free creation formed through the redemptive act of Christ. It is juridically constituted and it is the symbolic reality of Jesus' presence. The Church teaches that it is not only a juridical or social reality; and this teaching was particularly articulated by Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XII.[2] This is the case because of the presence in it of the grace of salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the essence of the Church. Hence, the Church is the primary sacrament of the eschatological grace of God, which cannot be revoked.

But this is to affirm that this symbol of the grace of God really contains what it signifies; that it is the primary sacrament of the grace of God, which does not merely designate but really possesses what was brought definitively into the world by Christ: the irrevocable, eschatological grace of God which conquers triumphantly the guilt of man.

The Church is indefectible, especially when we look at it as the Church of the infallible truth and as the Church of the sacraments. The Church is also indefectible as the *opus operatum*.[3] The concept of *opus operatum* means, "grace is conferred on the recipient

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[2] Cf. POPE LEO XIII, *Satis Cognitum: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the unity of the Church, 15,* 29.06.1896, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_29061896_satis-cognitum.html, (27.11.2015).

[3] *Opus operatum* means the unequivocal, permanent, historically perceptible pledge of grace to the individual man, a pledge made irrevocably by God and recognizable as such. This is the positive content of the concept. The expression that there is question of God's production of grace without the subjective merit of the minister or of the recipient is only the negative, and therefore secondary, formulation. William A. VAN ROO, *The Church and Theological investigations 5, Rome*, Gregorian University, 2012, 162.

through the positing of the sacramental sign itself, and neither the merit (holiness) of the minister nor that of the recipient is causally involved."[4]

The Church is indefectible because it is indestructibly holy as a whole. The Church is also indefectible even in cases of subjective grace of people by which the Church is not just an object of faith but it is the full symbol of the triumphant mercy of Christ, who remains in it.

The Church is a basic sacrament of the salvation of the world. It is the "sacrament of that mysterious community of those who truly believe and whom God's unrestrainable action of grace has made into true believers. It is the "proto-sacrament; this means, however, that she is, in her whole concrete, visible and juridically verifiable appearance, a real sign and embodiment of the salvific will of God and of the grace of Christ."[5] Of special importance is also the understanding of the Second Vatican Council that also considered the Church as the sacrament of salvation.[6]

CONCLUSION

The Church is a sacrament of the unity of all people in God for their salvation. It is a basic sacrament of salvation in virtue of her nature, which is that of being determinative and constitutive. The Church is a sacrament because it is the "sign in history which brings to manifestation at the historical level, and thereby also "effects," the will of God towards the world which creates salvation and unity."[7] It is the "real, permanent and ever valid presence of God in the world."[8] The Church is also a symbol and sacrament of unity for humanity, brought about because of the self-communication of God in grace. The Church is a sacrament of people's salvation in the world. This is the case because she points to and renders present the grace of God in the world and this grace will never disappear again from the world. In this sense, the Church is a sign of the eschatological victory of God in the world. The grace that God communicated to the world impels the world towards the consummation of the Kingdom of God, regardless of the problems and pitfalls that the Church may encounter.[9] The Church is an effective sacramental sign of the grace of God because through it, the will of God to bestow grace through his self-communication is manifested at a historical level in the world.

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[2] FISKE John, Introduction to communication studies, New York, Routledge, 1990, 2.

[3] LEVER Franco - RIVOLTELLA Pier Cesare - ZANACCHI Adriano (Edd.), La comunicazione. Dizionario di scienze e tecniche, , Roma, ELLEDICI-RAI-ERI-LAS, 2002.

[4] POPE LEO XIII, Satis Cognitum: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the unity of the Church, 15, 29.06.1896, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_29061896_satis-cognitum.html, (27.11.2015).

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[4] Karl RAHNER, *The Church and Theological investigations 5,* London, Burns and Oates, 1963, 25.

[5] Karl RAHNER, *Membership of the Church,* in Karl RAHNER, "Theological investigations, Volume 2, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963, 73.

[6] Karl RAHNER, *What is a sacrament,* in *"Theological investigations: The theology of the spiritual life,"* translated by David BOURKE, 3 (1976) 141-142.

[7] RAHNER, *What is a sacrament,* 142.

[8] RAHNER, *Membership of the Church,* 76.

[9] Cf. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian faith*, 321-211.

[5] RAHNER Karl, Christology within an evolutionary view, in Karl RAHNER, "Theological investigations, Volume 5, Later writings," London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, 174.

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