

Saint Paul, Communicator Model

Giuseppe Mazza

Two premises and one question

Two premises seem to us immediately necessary. The first concerns the general approach: exposure is born as a reflection of a scholar of fundamental theology and of philosophy of communication. As such, it does not move from a biblical approach but develops its argument in an interdisciplinary way, between theology, anthropology and communication sciences. The second premise concerns a two-choice lexical choice in the title, which for the time being we only draw attention to: the use of the term "model" and "communicator" instead of "communication".

We enter *in medias res*, placing first and foremost a question: from the operative point of view, as well as theological-pastoral, what is the utility of trying to define a "model" of communication? And more specifically: what can it serve to highlight the coordinates of the Pauline communication model (if there is one)?

A comprehensive answer would require further analysis that goes well beyond the intentions of this intervention. It seems to us, however, important to clear the field from some misunderstandings that have always been in the intriguing mania of the "hunt for the model". To do this, let's take a few steps back and let's take a look at the universe unfolded by the interaction between theology and communication studies.

Model or paradigm?

The use of the concept of "model" in theology, borrowed primarily by natural sciences, had some follow-up since the middle of the last century. It expresses the attempt to "get to a more thorough and organic knowledge of the object of theology (conceived both in general and in its division in disciplines) and at the same time to come to systematically identify the nature of the theological thought itself, its constructive "laws" and its internal dynamics, the complex developments and changes of those elements that make up the essence and define its main epistemological categories. "In this sense, the concept of "model" is broadly similar to that of "paradigm", which recalls the explanatory intent that is able to encompass the symbolic, values and operational generalizations shared by a community. While the call to the model expresses a more marked theoretical formalization intent, the paradigm refers to a background understanding (or even a pre-understanding) that sums up "a way of feeling, perceiving, understanding, evaluating, judging reality; to relate vitally to it by acting, working, and creating relationships so as to direct its own existence, the dynamics of inter-subjective relations and the transformation of the world ": a bridge, in short, between a global and a real, a living and operational interface that collects" all assumptions, implications, conscious or uneducated postulates, convictions, condolences and idiosyncrasies, habits, practices, customs, rites, doctrines, interpretative schemes and actions, and behaviors."

Inductive potentialities of the paradigm make it the obligatory reference to make sense not only of an effort of understanding that tends to pull the

sums, drawing patterns and hypothetical structures, but also a background (perhaps not explicit but not ideal) which is the prelude to the historical expression of the theoretical framework. The paradigm assumes a background that makes the difference. Again, if there is a reference to communication in the game, it offers something more than the conceptual sphere of the model.

From the seventies North American theology has sought to link the theological models to the open universe of communication. The authoritative synthesis of Avery Dulles, condensed in *Models of the Church* (1974) and *Models of Revelation* (1983), is set in the perspective of a theology of revelation and reshapes a model theory in the wake of E. Troeltsch and Niebuhr of *Christ and Culture*. The search for "theoretical" patterns of revelation finds engagement with the studies of communication precisely through the guiding idea of Dulles, for which the church is in itself communication. The underlying methodology is that of logical-scientific formalization: the revelation as a theoretical model (on IG Barbour's footprint) fits the theory of exchange models applied to communication since the 1940s (from H. Lasswell's hypodermic theory to mathematical model of Shannon and Weaver, from Jakobson's linguistic information models to the developments of the Palo Alto school). If, then, Dulles can assert that "by using analogy it can be said that the theological model is for religion the same as the theoretical model for science," it is obvious to expect an equivalent degree of formalization for the function of the models in communication. The reality of the facts, however, denies this assumption. The latest studies on communication as well as common sense so much agree that the communicative act is far more complex than it can express the synthesis of a model.

This applies to three levels:

- at the level of dynamics and content, because no encoding can exhaust them, even on a cyclical or seasonal basis;
- - on a contextual level, because each press awakens attention on a non-communicative substratum that is equally eloquent and indissolubly linked to it;
- - at the level of the effects, because (as evidenced by the failure of theories of advertising in the first half of the twentieth century) no model can claim foresight effectiveness such as to render the phenomenological attention raised by each new communicative act obsolete.
- The specific case of Paul of Tarsus makes the schema of a communicative model even more difficult. Let's see why.

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Paul: an athlete of communication

- It is not hard for us to consider Paul of Tarsus as a communicator of excellence. We do rightly so: the Apostle is at the origin of an announcement of great proportions, and it is undeniable the propulsive force that he imprints at the maturation of the communities of the origins.
- Paul's enthusiasm is astonishing: a man with broad views and courageous choices challenges the times and spaces of cultures to

imagine the uncomfortable possibility of an alternative proposition. He pays for himself for what he announces. Incomplete, he continues to communicate the only gospel in which he recognizes the glowing debut of a salvation story.

- The success of his apostolate - remembers Benedict XVI - depends above all on "his personal involvement in proclaiming the gospel with total dedication to Christ; dedication that does not fear risks, difficulties and persecutions." But this is not a solitary "consecration": a host of collaborators share his anxieties and joys, difficulties, and gratification. From a communicative point of view, Paul is a striking example of how - in Birdwhisell - an individual does not communicate, but always takes part in a communication.
- This last point is worthy of note. Paul's communication is shared, at various levels, by an effective network of collaborators who act as an operational interface with the territory, which animate active, responsible and conscious participation. The nomenclature is varied - Paul speaks of "collaborator" (synergós), "brother" (adelphós), "minister" (diákonos), "apostle" (apóstolos) - but the function of hinging with local resources is clear. It is not merely an amplifier but a co-responsible promoter of a single work.
- Many names are well-known, others a little less: Epaphra (see Col 1,7, 4,12, Fm 23), Epaphroditus (see Fil 2,25, 4,18), Tychicus (see At 20, 4, 2, 4, 12, Tt 3, 12), Urban (see Rm 16,9), Gaio and Aristarchus (see Acts 19,29, 20,4, 27, 2, Col 4,10), Febe (see Rm 16,1), Trifèna and Trifòsa (see Rm 16,12), Pèside (see Rm 16,12-13), Prisca and Aquila (see Rm 16, 3; 1Cor 16, 19; 2Tm 4,19) and, amongst others, Timothy's figure, mentioned more than 20 times, and a direct recipient of many Apostle's directions and recommendations.
- One clearly sees therefore the "transitive" gesture - both participative and transactional - of Pauline communication: it enlightens in the negotiating engagement of local resources, in the rich and cordial phenomenology of meeting and exchange, in the promotional logic of the "mandate" to the collaborators who, far from looking like a simple sub delegation, associates men and women to the ministry of a responsible announcement.
- This tactical and programmatic wealth is hardly synthesized in a schematic model, and this is not so much and not just because of the intrinsic complexity of the processes in progress. To be in the game is also a dense contextual substrate that, by acting on a pervasive level, engages in a communicative style by transforming it. Some elements implied in Paul's life experience and announcement seem to be more determinant than others in qualifying a possible Pauline communicative model: as we shall see, this is the most unreliable element. To this we add to the fact that for each documentary testimony of the communicative virtues related to the spread of the Pauline work, one could probably list another of the opposite sign. Some of the apostolic portraits of the Apostle argue that it is a disadvantage in terms of communicative effectiveness: it may surprise you, but some texts would even presume that the communicative Paul is a true mystification!

- This set of considerations discourages any attempt to articulate an ideal model of communication related to the style of the Apostle. If this were possible, it would not necessarily be the most useful thing. Could we have more luck (and more advantage) in trying to find a Pauline communication paradigm then? In the light of the terminological distinction we have stylized, the answer is probably yes. And it is certainly useful at least in the sense of recovering all those implicit, background dimensions we have mentioned and which are at least as important as those, more effervescent, that derive from the overwhelming pastoral eloquence testified by the Letters. If Paul's communication was a painting, the voids, the shadows, the *chiaroscuros*, the less expressive traces would have the same importance as the most lively brushstrokes. If the background is really to make the difference, you need to understand the communication capacity in all its magnitude.
- Also a dense contextual substrate, by acting on a pervasive level, engages in a communicative style by transforming it. Some elements implied in Paul's life experience and announcement seem to be more determinant than others in qualifying a possible Pauline communicative model: as we shall see, this is the most unreliable element. To this we add to the fact that for each documentary testimony of the communicative virtues related to the spread of the Pauline work, one could probably list another of the opposite sign. Some of the apostolic portraits of the Apostle argue that it is a disadvantage in terms of communicative effectiveness: it may surprise you, but some texts would even presume that the communicative Paul is a true mystification!

An undeniable background

- Let us begin, paradoxically, by the non-communicating Paul, from his complex background, from that which - beyond our most immediate expectations - he does not say. Behind the titanic figure we are accustomed to hypothesize by reading the Letters, as Perego says,
- a forged personality under the blows of numerous defeats and few victories. Among the most painful experiences, some deserve a nod: Stupefaction with him in Antioch, the church where Paul had lived the first missionary experience (Galatians 2: 1-2); the insults of the Corinthian brothers, the community of great promises (2 Corinthians 10-13); the defection of some faithful collaborators who desert (1 Timothy 1,20; 2 Timothy 4:10); the total detachment of the Roman community in his last imprisonment (2 Timothy 4:16), not to mention Christian opponents, the true "spin in the flesh" of his apostolate (2 Corinthians 12: 7).
- Historically, Paul is witness to great changes, with whom he has to count on his work of evangelization. Perego writes:
- With Paul the balance of the world changes: the center of gravity of faith moves from Jerusalem to Rome; the fulcrum of religious identity passes from the splendor of the temple to the abundance of domestic churches; the training provided by the masters of the Torah is now delegated to the testimony of Paul's collaborators, men and women;

the principles of separation and election give way to those of incarnation and inculturation, not without risk.

Some difficulties in the context are added. Judging by conflicts, internal and external to his communities and his relations with the leadership of the first church, his character was probably not the most lovable. He is not a talented speaker: his opponents underline his weak physical presence and the unspoken word (cf. 2 Cor 10:10). Moreover, it seems that upstream of its communicative activity - and of a writer in the first place - has been a pressing demand rather than the taste of a passionate hobby: a duty more than a boast, as he himself will say (see 1 Cor 9:16). Writes Romano Penna:

- He was not born [...] with the vocation of the writer. It was not already in the material sense of knowing how to handle a calamity (since its poor interventions of this kind, according to what we read in Gal. 6:11, should have been unimpressive), but not as much as the pride and pleasure of knowing how to draw any text perhaps dictating to a scribe, as he usually did (as in 2Cor 11,6 it is inexperienced in the word).
- He does not care much about form, and content. And the general impression is that
- the material that Paul has to communicate extends so much his verbal transmission capacity to create in his mind a kind of conceptual clogging and hence such a density making it difficult to comprehend
- It is exactly this "exceeding" that makes the difference. Paul seems to recall him everywhere: the reflection of the divine glorious glory shines in us "as in a mirror" (2Cor 3,18), but - far from contending - our perception of it remains confused, imperfect (cf. 1 Cor 13:12); even in prayer "we do not even know what is convenient to ask, but the Spirit itself intercedes with insistence on us, with inexpressible groans" (Rm 8:26); Moreover, the disciple of Christ knows that the earthly limit can not be regarded as the last frontier of his existence, since he has always been called to look at invisible things that exceed the visible ones (cf. 2 Cor 4:18).
- So much more than we cannot say about what we can communicate. Paul himself, taken up by the mystery of grace, he is well aware of communicating (only) what lives in him, a gift that overcomes and transcends him infinitely: "I am no longer alive, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2 , 20). He is an apostle "by the will of God" (2Cor 1.1) and "by vocation" (Rm 1.1; 1Cor 1.1), but his own self-understanding, his being an apostle implies being "taken" by Christ, to see Christ, being irradiated by Him.
- Of this silent and overwhelming substratum in Paul we are only indirect witnesses. It is part of is often tormented interiority, the psychological and emotional return of an intense pastoral activity, the unfathomable depths of his personal experience of the mystery, of grace, of the revelation of that God who had learned to know from his youth and had " re-learned "as an adult. There is a universal experience that Paul shares with all true communicators, an anthropological coordinate that could make a figure for every kind of authentic communication. This is Paul's communication identity card: it's the size of the listening.
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- **A listening communicator**
- The communicative Paul we know from Scripture places the fidelity to the origin and the beginning of listening at the center of his action. It has already been noted by mentioning the network of its collaborators: communicating in listening to the communities, their context and their realistic perspectives and problems is the guarantee, for Paul, of diligent fidelity to his own gospel proclamation. It is a reflection of that receptiveness toward grace which he considers to be at the source, recognizing that his ministry would simply not exist without the absolute primacy of that salvation by which he was seized. Finally, it is the indispensable condition for seizing the signs of his time and working on the delivery of that divine truth that always resounds to the meat of our concrete story. By meeting and listening to others, Paul draws himself, his ultimate vocation, the truth of his missionary mandate. Announcing he announces, and listening, he is listened to.
- Even beyond the horizon of religious experience, listening is an indispensable communicative dynamic. It is, in fact, an integral part of the communicative process: not only as its logical antecedent, not just as its condition and guarantee, but also and above all as a constitutive figure of its own articulation. On one hand, listening is already a communicative one; On the other hand, no kind of communication can ever be ignored by the actual exercise of listening: it is not foreign, but connotes the "other face" of a single medal. Real communication is always (in) listening: programmed to the out-of-mind, empathically open to the environment (object, context, recipient) of his giving, which he absorbs and always recognizes as his own.
- Social communications draw more than any other science to the anthropological first dimension of that listening - which is just the case to emphasize - does not now identify only a spatial space and does not interrupt the hearing dimension alone. We could hyperbolically claim that man is in his world as communication is listening: being in the world and communicating-listening are in fact two expressive vectors of mankind, two paths on which man is such and becomes more and more self.

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A concrete form of listening: active reception

Listening has many names and many forms. The communicative paradigm of Paul expresses the tangible presence through what applied semiotics studies will call active reception. It represents the decisive act of communication itself, making it a fact that - if theoretically there could be a communication without a conscious broadcaster (think of the "cybernetic" communication or the one provided by point to point structures in computer networks) there could never be communication without a receptor (even just virtual) that gives it a sense. This is because the act of "production" of meaning is merely anthropological act, bound to interaction-that must always be such, and never be delegated to any external mechanical agent-of human partners.

In the variety of its degrees (from the immediate reception, as in the case of condensed reflexes, to the most critical, demilitarizing, deconstructing resistance), active reception constitutes a constant of every communication

process, our very soul interfacing with the world and welcoming it, more or less enthusiastically, as "our" world, the human world.

- Paul teaches a great deal in this regard: no one could truly grasp the deepest meaning of his epistle without taking into account the concrete people he is addressing: the communities, the faces, the names (some of which, as we have seen, are recurrently mentioned), the situations and the contexts that Paul cites naturally, interpreting one by one the interlocutors of his speech, by making the letter a vehicle of "targeted" meaning precisely to a name, address, destination. Moreover, it is through a vigilant listening, attentive to the context as to the details, that Paul exercises his paternity and authority on the communities he founded or who are in his orbit. In fact, try to enter into the experiential fabric of his interlocutors by making instances, difficulties, doubts, but also successes and advances. He captures all the good that God is doing in churches (Corinth in 1Cor 1,4-7, Thessalonica in 1Ts 1,2-10, Philip in Phil 1,3-7, and so on), but he equally shows awareness of the problems that arise, of the diatribes and of the contrasts that emerge.
- The world of Letters is dynamic, irregular, changeable and asymmetrical as any historical reality: Paul's sense of being universal messengers is for that world, he is built with and for it. It is not a pre-packaged communication, but it is not a mechanically repeatable protocol. It is an open communication that sees in the context not an obstacle, not the hindrance to universality, but its more connatural incarnation.

A lesson for us: communicate in context

- The context: here is what one a communicator must not neglect. It's easy to underestimate it, but it's unwise to overlook the impact. The concrete situation of the subjects of pastoral action constitutes a true locus theologicus which would be unconscious to ignore.
- In his lecture, Schillebeeckx pointed out that, as a matter of fact, Jesus' words and actions are not normative, as well as the relationship between words and actions and their context, seen in the light of faith. The duty to relate to the environment as Jesus relied on his own allows us to see the need, in the church, of becoming always new flesh in the contexts of men's history.
- Acting as Christ, relating to his word, and acting in context: this is a challenge to be accepted, aware that to stop listening to the world and history would be like closing oneself in that gross blunder that J.B. Metz denounced, condemning a Catholic church
- insensitive and stubborn as an elephant, and this is now in a dual perspective: insensitive to the seductions and suggestions of the so-called spirit of time, a sort of inattentive production. Secondly, though, it he also insensitive to those sitting up and pointing to the elephant road.
- Today as yesterday it can actually happen that the Christian community be
- particularly interested in the contents of his communicative activity. Here comes his concern for orthodoxy, understood in the sense of a coincidence, both conceptual and linguistic, with tradition. [...] In ecclesial communication processes it is not enough to produce true

propositions. These must be mediated by the partners whose expectations and needs will be present in communication - not just in the way but also in the content - before which the ecclesiastical communicator remains purely passive. Free communication excludes submission on both sides. Both as regards the content and the language of ecclesiastical communication, the theological source of knowledge is constituted by the partner's situation.

- Attention to the situation, context, makes communicative communication more than a mild episodic relationship. Communicating in context, on the example of Pauline, means recapturing and reworking the richness and complexity of historical reality with respect and wisdom. The context is far more than a communicative opportunity: to consider it a gimmick (a means through which to reach, to do, to say, without the means itself to have its own value) or a preliminary banal, a pre-text communicative, not it only wastes the effectiveness, but offends the very nature of the communicative act, which does not exist except at the same time.
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- **Beyond the idolatry of meaning**
- It is to be understood, therefore, how naive the hermeneutics that have the capacity to "extract meaning from the context" (as if it really is possible) are as effective as their own condition of effectiveness. Rather, truth and meaning must always be sought - and Paul himself teaches it - not as "material" objects to be pursued and "disposed of" in their supposed hiding place, but as a result of an ever-open, dynamic, unpredictable interactive process. The ability to communicate in listening must always escape from the deceptive idolatry of the meaning that - by propagating a tendentious reading of the famous mtluhanian adage, "the medium is the message" - risks subordinating communication to a concept of solipsistic and anti-contingent truth. One must really overcome that communicative drift towards the significance that is highlighted by historical progression through the so-called three "sign stages" (for Pierce: indices, icons and symbols, or those elements in which classical manual recognizes the scanning of the "three ages of the signs'). It is never late to make the big leap from the predatory tendency with which we usually approach the aids of our knowledge, that "escapatory" intent with which we are concerned to "scrutinize" books and events, to distract concepts that are only fruit of abstraction and illusory conquest. The imperative of listening disqualifies this approach and reminds us of the duty of humble research, attentive to the truth where / how it is to be grasped and not where / how we would want at all costs.
- This is the most urgent premise for communication to cease to be an act of domination, flow, directionality at all cost and deforming costs, to discover a gift that is born of the gift, word from (P) word, say of the ego that springs from the very gift of the You: ministry of welcome, giving and reciprocity, event of globality and participation. This certainly requires a review of some well-known relational patterns: the "ideological" rhetoric of the frontal adornment, the alibi of the medial distance, the ideological disqualification of that trust for the human

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- This is the most urgent premise for communication to cease to be an act of domination, flow, directionality at all cost and deforming costs, to discover a gift that is born of the gift, word from (P) word, say of the ego that springs from the gift same of you: ministry of reception, delivery and reciprocity, event of globality and participation. This certainly requires a review of some well-known relational patterns: the "ideological" rhetoric of the frontal adornment, the alibi of the medial distance, the ideological disqualification of that trust for the human being, still constituting the "elementary belief" of every culture and religion.
- Listening communication is a truly free communication. It is so free that it can easily and without poisoning itself use the relational strategy of "referential fallacy" (the "right to lie", namely the concrete freedom from the objective referent and the need to develop a unique correspondence between it and the signifier) and from that of the "not-told" (the light-shining games of light and shadows in figurative arts, silences in music, textual omissions in literature, and so on).
- More than anything, communication is true when the human person is at its center. Recalling anthropologically the truth of the communicative act offers the opportunity for strategic gain in many ways, not least in terms of operational effectiveness. The modern requirements of globality and the imperative of connectivity to the bitter end can gain more authentic "human" listening an inexhaustible source of inspiration

- and an unparalleled remedy against obsolescence threat.
- The act of listening never gets old, and you do not grow old while technology fades and gives way to new and more sophisticated operational tools, the attention to man creates solid roots for a communication no longer exposed to the risks of 'inflation of its vehicle support. The Aim of this faithfulness - faithfulness to man, his existential variables, its context and its hermeneutical horizon - is the first step of a trusting attitude that makes the medium its absolute, but knows composing with prudent discernment the pregnancy of the medium and the "anthropological" truth of the message.
 - That's what Paul did. We have already mentioned (and summarize) the traces of his communicative style that call for the most convincing attention to man: his receptive capacity towards the recipients and the various contexts, which translates into a continuous process of incarnation of the gospel in different cultures; the flexibility to evaluate every situation, experience and every means, transforming them into a precious occasion to communicate the gospel in the concreteness of an ongoing experience; his ability to build cooperative interactions, involving men and women who, together with him, become protagonists in building the first communities; the ability to strategically configure a network of communications, in this case a network of home churches that, starting from the great cities of the Mediterranean world, extends throughout the empire, but maintains in its center the originality of diversity, uniqueness of the individual centers of nervousness, the unrepeatability of their situations; the ability to communicate, in proportion to the receptive capacities of each, a living experience of the crucified, dead and risen Christ, not as a collection of abstract concepts or memories received, but as a dynamic and engaging experience that lives in him.
 - Undoubtedly, these are elements of an impact communication that - today more than ever - recognizes among its core strategies such key points: the ability to know, listen, to accept before formulating, proposing, acting; the effort to create synergies and team-work, enhancing resources and opportunities; the need to measure with the paths of multi and polymediality, with the logic of connectivity, with the importance of not only confining content but generating profound experiences in the recipients.
 - As we note in the 2008 edition of the week of Bible and Communication Studies, particular attention should be paid to communicative anthropology which is at the same time:
 - - receptive: able to "inhabit the world", to explore the "anthropological pockets" of history, to scant their prospects and expectations, listening to God and man;
 - - cooperative: capable of inventing places of convergence, beyond the logic of "delegation", for bold and shared creativity;
 - - testimonial: attentive to the identities and the discrepancies between the medium and the message, oriented to conformation to the normative Model, faithful to the original gift;
 - - cross medial: attentive to the concrete value attributed to the tools, contexts and their possible, often unpublished hybridizations;

- - Connective: it is attentive both to the "nodes" and to the "centers" of irradiation as to the vital links that make them network, in a dynamic open relational

At the center there are no techniques, resources, styles or technologies. There is a person who is attentive to the people. There is an articulated exchange between brokers who are protagonists of the same negotiating act that they put in place. Technical expertise is not the most important part of this exchange. It is necessary, as the Apostle puts it, to be "all to all": to be fully offered as a fullness of life, a gracefully informed truth of inexhaustible Truth, a path, a walking path, a reflection of the diaphanous and genuine source of a visible, audible, tangible Life. Christian faith finds in this criterion of credible testimony its own reason for being and its own hermeneutic key. The sign of life offered to the world is always the one offered and discovered in the sharing as a sign of signs, as a sign with (all other) signs, "plural" infinite infinitely wed, faith always arranged according to the theological geometries of hope and charity, the expectation and the gift that communion is made.