

HOW GOD COMMUNICATES

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This paper will explore different means of communication that God has used to communicate to His beloved children, paying special attention to the communication of the Apostle St. Paul in the first century. Let us begin by pondering God's great desire to communicate to His children. We were created out of love, and for love thus he desires to communicate His great love for us. Communication is the essence of love. Love seeks to give itself away, to communicate or share itself. God demonstrated His love through sending His Word, He sent His only Son to redeem us, proving His great love for us. The gift of the Sacred



Scriptures is communicating His Word and His love; it is the greatest love letter. As St. Augustine puts it, "The end of all divine scriptures is the love for the Being in which we should rejoice and love for the being that can rejoice with us is love....Whoever... thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it at all."¹ Through His Word, He chooses to communicate to us, breathing life into our souls through His Word, and He continues to speak to us through this Word documented in the Sacred Scriptures and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The etymology of communication is the word common. To communicate something, means to share what was communicated in common. When we share something good, beautiful, or truth, we then have it in common; and because what is good, beautiful and true is of God, that means we "possess" God together, creating a community. But actually, that means we are actually "in" God. We share Him, and therefore, we actually share each other. When we communicate something good, true or beautiful, we actually become more in union with the one with whom we communicate. Therefore, communication of things that are good, true and beautiful unites us and brings us together in God. This is the purpose of communication...to unite and to unify in love. This is why God communicated Himself to us, so that we could become one with Him. Communication brings unity. This is why the Holy Spirit - God's "communication" - is the Spirit of Unity.

Furthermore, communication is meant to make us a family. We are destined to be a family, a common people of one mind, heart and mission. This is was the goal of the early Christians and remains our mission in the Church today, "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers."² Moreover, communication with one another leads us into union with one another; this union should also lead us back to God and communion with Him. We unite as a family in order to walk, as a family, back to God. Very simply, the Word comes down from Heaven to communicate with us and come into union with us, thus forming a family out of the scattered and divided human race, and together - and only together - do we move back to Heaven, our eternal destiny, united with one another and Christ. This is shown to us powerfully in the Eucharist. When we eat the Body and Blood of our Lord, we become like Him. And since we are eating of the same Body and Blood, we come to have the same divine Body and Blood within us. We are a "blood-related" family. Jesus, by making us all the same Body and Blood, unites into one single family in Him. Therefore, all communication between us should not only stem from our communication with God, but it should also lead us together back to Him.

Although, many today claim that God does not communicate anymore or not specifically to individuals, it is true that God may not send a text or Facebook invite; but to hear God one only has to seek Him. To quiet these outside and inside noises and open ones heart. Communing with God heart to heart is possible and encouraged by reading His Word to hear how He is speaking to our hearts specifically. The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum encourages us to daily read the Scriptures. "... Prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying."³ He left His testimony to His children in writing, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the docility of His disciples.

"Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. ... written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted."⁴

Although in the first century the Early Church did not have the gift of the New Testament as we know it, it was written between the years 45A.D. and 90 A.D., and the Canon was not composed until the late fourth century.⁵ Even then, the scriptures were not readily available to many. One may ask how the Early Church communicated the truths and teachings of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. They were known by their love for one another and communicated to each other orally the traditions and beginnings of the Church. With the limitation of travel and common language you can imagine the difficulties they must have encountered but with the grace of God they succeeded. The gifts given by the Holy Spirit on the Solemnity of Pentecost proved that God was bigger than these seeming obstacles. "The disciples spoke in the language of every nation. In Pentecost God chose this means to indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit: whoever had received the Spirit spoke in every kind of tongue... It was love that was to bring the Church of God together all over the world... so today the Church, united by the Holy Spirit, speaks in the language of every people."⁶

God desiring to communicate with His children, raised up disciples to bring the Good News to all of humanity. Arguably one of the greatest of these disciples of the Word was, the missionary to the Gentiles, the Apostle, St. Paul; he used communication to bring God's love and encourage the Family of Jesus, the Church. Within the Book of Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament Epistles a picture of Paul is sketched for the reader. St. Paul was a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia (Acts 9:11, 30; 11:25; 21:39). He was named Saul but upon his acceptance of Christianity he took the name of Paul. He was also a Roman citizen. Practicing Judaism and more specifically brought up as a Pharisee, zealous for the Law and Jewish Tradition. He received part of his education in Jerusalem, 'at the feet of Gamaliel' (Acts 22:3).⁷ St. Paul is known to have three missionary journeys, where he traveled an estimated 10,000 miles. On his travels and mission he suffered much persecution: (2 Corinthians 11:24-25). Although he traveled often he did make prolonged stops at specific places communicating the faith, through preaching, teaching, and his witness and relationships. He eventually was imprisoned in Rome for about 2 years and he was able to encourage many of the young Churches at that time through letters that he wrote and sent with messengers or fellow disciples. One of his closest disciples or assistant was St. Timothy, who delivered 6 of Paul's letters including: 2nd Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, and Philemon. Some Scholars believe that St. Timothy even co-authored some of St. Paul's letter (Especially the 1st & 2nd Letter of Timothy).⁸

Communication in the days of St. Paul was not as it is today, for many reasons. Resources were not readily available, making the cost of writing materials very high and therefore available only to a limited audience. There was not a delivery network for private correspondence to write; again only those who could afford a courier were able to send. As well as the average person was not literate.⁹ While these oppositions to letter writing did exist, still letters were written, sent, and preserved which is pretty remarkable. The Roman Empire had regular mail service for government and military officials, but not for the general public. Most people would have to send letters along with friends or merchants traveling to other places. Letters of recommendation were important for travelers visiting friends of friends.¹⁰ Even the ancient Persians had an amazing postal system (see Esther 3:13,15; 9:20--the word "posts" means "postmen" or "runners"). Herodotus, the ancient historian, described these postmen as follows:

"Nothing mortal travels so fast as these Persian messengers. Along the whole line of road there are men stationed with horses, in number equal to the number of days which the journey takes, allowing a man and horse to each day; and these men will not be hindered from accomplishing at their best speed the distance which they have to go, either by snow or rain, or heat, or by the darkness of night. The first rider delivers his dispatch to the second, and the second passes it to the third; and so it is borne from hand to hand along the whole line" (8.98).¹¹

St. Paul's letters were to a public audience but were still in need of a private carrier to bring these messages to the Church Communities. As previously mentioned Timothy and Titus were among some of his messengers as well as the Christian Community, passing along the letters.

The Lord had an amazing plan for St. Paul, from the beginning of time even while he was persecuting the Church. Being that St. Paul spoke the common language of his time, Greek as well as Hebrew and Aramaic he

could communicate to most of the known world the truths of Jesus Christ. He was also exposed to multiple cultures, Jewish and Hellenistic/Greek, making him an ideal "transition figure" for the spread of early Christianity from its beginnings in Palestine to the rest of the Roman Empire.¹² God had an amazing plan for St. Paul and continues to direct His church clearly through St. Paul's inspired words, letters and witness even today.

1 St. Augustine, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Volume IX. Inner Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2000, p. 133.

2 Holy Bible, New American Bible, Acts of the Apostles 2:42, USCCB.org

3 Ven. Pope Paul VI, Dei Verbum, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Nov. 18, 1965, 25

4 *ibid*, 11

5 Reid, George, Original Catholic Encyclopedia, Canon of the Holy Scriptures, oce.catholic.com

6 Office of Readings, Seventh Week of Easter, From a sermon by a sixth century African Author, Catholic Book Publishing Corp. New York, 1976, p. 1006.

7 Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J., at <http://catholic-resources.org>

8 *ibid*

9 Freedman, Eerdnans, Dictionary of the Bible, William B. Eedermans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000, p. 1018

10 Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J., at <http://catholic-resources.org>

11 Bible Times and Customs, Bible Study, Middletown Bible Church, middletownbiblechurch.org

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