

Communication: Fully Human and Truly Divine

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Introduction

There are several social, moral issues knocking on our doorsteps that need answering. First, and perhaps the most infamous of them is the unresolved extra-judicial killings (EJK's) that is steadily swelling, together with this is the on-going debate to bring back death as capital punishment to those engage in drug-trade. Next, and in no order of degree, are the following: the conflict of values among capitalists, policy-makers, and environmental activists with regards to the concerns on mining and other natural resources, which directly affects the total human condition; the perennial problem of labor displacement, mismatched educational preparation to job market, and the mechanisms that legitimate them; the problem on peace talks between the government and other parties, while ordinary citizens are caught and suffer in the crossfire; the continuous ranting of President Duterte (PDU30) to all of his critiques in his war on drugs specially to human rights advocates and to the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the Philippines (CBCP), while the problem on drugs remain to be regarded as merely criminal issue. All of these will surely prompt anyone with sense and sensibility, especially scholars, to peer into these problems.

While there are complex of reasons, and myriad of complications that result from these conflicts, the right cures remain to be elusive. However, as any ailment seeks correct diagnosis and prognosis, leaders from each side and experts from different fields need to talk and collaborate to understand where conflicting parties are coming from, and to decide where they want such to lead into. And when all concerns had been heard, and different positions had been respected, only then would suitable remedies be recommended to each of his due. All of these would only be possible if genuine dialogue is at work. This is where communication becomes relevant to the fore. This is the thrust of

this exposition.

It is by these aforementioned considerations that this scholar is prompted to dwell again on the topic of communication, asking: “What makes the Theory of Communicative Action of Jurgen Habermas an ideal-type of dialogue, yet can further learn from the Judeo-Christian’s “divine communication”? To aid in answering this research question, the following will be the points for discussion:

1. How modernity made humans rationalize and consequently act peculiarly?
2. What are the forms of human acts throughout history that define the way we live? How do they differ with one another?
3. Why is there a need to examine the consciousness and behavior of a person in order to understand how he perceives his social environment? In other words, why do we have to unravel first the way people think and do in order to decipher what they really communicate?
4. What makes Jurgen Habermas’s Communicative Action an ideal-type of communication (dialogue)?
5. What makes the Judeo-Christian understanding of the biblical “divine communication” the “ideal” of the ideal-type of communication?

In the end, the scholar hopes that this exposition will be able to contribute to the understanding of the need and power of genuine dialogue, especially at these times.

To begin with, an understanding of modern human rationalization is explicated.

I. Instrumental Rationality and Purposive Action

Jurgen Habermas is one, if not the remaining rationalist in the post-secular era. Habermas following the tradition of the Frankfurt School¹ wished to revive the spirit of Enlightenment

¹ It is better known as the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. The Frankfurt School approach can be characterized as an attempt to develop a Hegelian-Marxism that is appropriate to the conditions of twentieth-century capitalism. It sought to modify Marx’s account of capitalism by recognizing the importance of the work of the sociologist Max Weber. To this, the Frankfurt School added an interest in psychoanalysis, and thus the project of fusing the work of Marx and Freud [see Andrew Edgar, *Habermas: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 48-49].

in its emancipatory purpose. In his study of Max Weber's rationalization,² Habermas understood that the emancipatory agenda of rationalization in the era of Enlightenment did not flourish the way it was intended. This was because Enlightenment rationalization instead became instrumental³.

As a result, the human rational choice became "programmed" to perform particular tasks in the most efficient means to arrive at the best possible result/s. As rationality became instrumental, human actions became instrumental or goal-oriented as well. This is because instrumental reason appeals to knowledge about the sensory (physical) world, particularly to the means-ends causal relationship. Accordingly, the best appropriate means (action, resources) are those that are judged to realize the most desired end-product. While instrumental reason is essential in the development and application of technology, Habermas supports Max Weber's recognition that instrumental rationality could not be the only form of reasoning there is. In fact, as both Habermas and Weber analyzed, problems arise when knowledge of the sense (physical) world becomes the only acceptable knowledge (as positivist philosophers would claim⁴). While other forms of knowledge were regarded as illegitimate, if not reflective of emotivism or decisionism⁵. In turn, this instrumental form of rationality was translated to become purposive-technological form of knowledge.⁶ With it, humans altered or shaped their

² For Weber, the superiority of Western culture lay in the fact that it had greater rationality. In part this was expressed in greater and more consistent use of instrumental reason, not merely through highly efficient technology but also through effective administration and social organization, rationally consistent legal and moral systems and even more rational art [Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976), 13-23]. Max Weber is a major source for Habermas's reflection on instrumental rationality [see Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 143-272].

³ It is the rational choice of the most appropriate means for the achievement of any given end. Instrumental reason appeals to knowable facts about the world, and in particular to the causal relationships that can be established between means and ends. The most appropriate means are therefore those actions and resources that are judged to realize the desired goals most efficiently. (Edgar, 74)

⁴ Positivism is an approach to the philosophy of science and the theory of knowledge, characterized by the primacy that it places upon the natural sciences as the principal or only source of sound knowledge claims. It has its origins in the work of the French philosopher and social theorist Auguste Comte [1798-1857] (see Edgar, 105-109).

⁵ Decisionism is the claim that value judgments, for example in ethics and political philosophy, and judgments about beauty or the value of art works, are not susceptible to rational resolution, and so can only be resolved through more or less arbitrary decisions, based on subjective caprice [see Jurgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 265].

⁶ In 1960s, Habermas formulated his theory of cognitive interests, and this represented his major contribution to the philosophy of science and the theory of knowledge (epistemology) in

environment to suit their needs, and satisfy their material desire. Such effect is produced by instrumental rationality, and modernity was its most apposite period in time⁷. By this, labor (work) was made not as means for some higher ends, like meaning-giving, social interaction, or relationship-building, but as product for profit. Proof of this is palpable in the capitalist, secular environment, where things were measured in their subsequent value or output: profit. This type of rationality is apt in capitalism because efficiency is its indispensable component in achieving results. Therefore, instrumental rationality serves its purpose well when applied to material objects. Weber observed that this instrumental rationality had permeated other institutions as well, like in governments together with the laws they have created (jurisprudence), science, research and technology (and even thrust in education), bureaucracy in public and private organizations⁸.

However, to employ the same type of rationality with persons is a different story. For it means persons will be treated as means for some ends. And when instrumental rationality is applied to humans and their relationships, actions become in Habermas's jargon, Strategic Action⁹.

that period. Here, Habermas is suggesting that there are three pre-conditions that have made human beings capable of surviving, flourishing and developing if humans had not been able to formulate knowledge in terms of the three interests: purposive-technological interest, hermeneutical interest, and emancipatory interest, to control and manipulate his physical environment, to study the meaning of man's action and communicate it, and to free humanity from misapprehensions - which is to say to free himself from self-imposed illusions that serve to hamper his autonomy, respectively (see Edgar, 10-15).

⁷In Habermas's critique of Marx where the latter considered only the role of instrumental reason for social change, the Right Hegelians fare no better. They stress the importance of individual freedom, and see the free market as a way to realize that freedom, and thereby, like the Left Hegelians (Marxists), fail to recognize the importance of communication in social life. Furthermore, the Right Hegelians offer a society that is bound together by people treating each other instrumentally (as means to satisfy their subjective desires through market exchanges) (Ibid., 99).

⁸In Habermas's study of Capitalism, he borrowed and developed two themes from the sociologist Max Weber: loss of meaning, and loss of freedom. Weber argued that the rational organization of capitalism drains the meaning from social life (see Weber 1946a, 148). For example, the economic and administrative imperatives placed on a university mean that a teacher have less time to spend with his students debating issues of philosophy and social theory, but more precisely described goals and targets that I must fulfill in relationship to them (Edgar, 8-9). While Weber recognizes that instrumental rationality is not the only form reasoning can take, Habermas suggested that instrumental reason is becoming increasingly dominant in the culture and organization of capitalist societies, not just through science and technology, but also in governmental and commercial bureaucracies (Ibid., 74).

⁹While this will be elaborated further, in a nutshell, it is a type of social action where one or more of the participants treat the others as if they were objects, rather than as fellow human beings with whom agreement and mutual understanding should be achieved (Ibid. 144). In the light of its instrumental aspect, Habermas defines strategic action as action oriented to success (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.1, 266).

II. Technical, Hermeneutical and Critical Acts

All these being said, Habermas wanted to rescue rationality in its original purpose, where man is not passive in dealing with the dictates of the system, but an active, critical participant, honing and re-appropriating his values and those of his community. This man also thinks and acts for higher social integration which will result to better meaningful (co)existence. When this happens, the intended spirit of Enlightenment, which is the emancipation from anything oppressive, will be realized.

To elaborate on the aforementioned, Habermas wrote in his earlier writing *Knowledge and Human Interest* that human beings have “cognitive interest” that are preconditions for survival and flourish, which stimulate them to generate knowledge about the physical world, social world, and the exercise of power (political). These different forms of knowledge in turn were translated into certain forms of actions becoming technical acts, hermeneutical acts, and emancipatory acts, respectively.¹⁰

First, in technical acts, humans shape their environment so that it could meet his material needs (and desires). As humans gained understanding of his physical world, his rationalization of the physical world in turn became instrumental, technical knowledge. This knowledge on the other hand, became his way of controlling his environment. This same operation is evident in the secular, capitalist, market-driven world as it concerns itself to product and the equivalent profit it makes. Likewise, in the secular world, the forms of action people are expected to perform are goal-oriented or purposive, and the manner by which this is to be brought out is via strategic action like competition, manipulation, or even seduction.

Second, Habermas defined hermeneutical acts, as those acts that give meaning to man’s existence. Humans, accordingly, interpret events in the past, including their existence in the world, and declare which for them are essential and valuable, and which are not. Humans learned that there are deeper reasons for living than improving ones lot with material resources. Habermas elaborates that humans do not just work to live; humans live and work for others and make their lives meaningful when they create

¹⁰ See Habermas, 1971a; also Edgar, 10-17.

relationships¹¹.

However, as reality would tell, relationships also involve relationships of power. The “colonization of the ‘lifeworld’¹²” by the system (i.e., capitalists and those in power) brings us to relate with one another as means (tools) to some ends (tasks) of their making. The rationalization of society reflects this world, and capitalism exemplifies this system.

This led Habermas to recognize that there is the third form of human action, one that is driven not by motive of goal (Strategic action) because of some technical, instrumental knowledge, but by critical knowledge that emancipates man from the control of the system, and those with less power from forms of oppressions. He believes that this emancipatory form of action could be realized through proper discourse. And only in discourse done in an environment where one can freely say, debate, negate/ accept a position, like in a public sphere¹³, or an ideal speech situation¹⁴, can critical knowledge work.

III. Unmasking ideological consciousness

Being critical is not an easy task. This is because motives and ideologies may not be evident in the consciousness of the persons in dialogue (or in collaboration). Motives and ideologies hide beneath their language. Consequently, abuses of power and imbalances in the system are either seen as inevitable or even natural. This is because consciousness, i.e., being aware and critical to one’s actions (and reasoning) becomes difficult to do because

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The process by which individual freedom is undermined in more complex societies, as large-scale social processes become increasingly autonomous and restrict the actions of those who are subject to them (Ibid, 17). In Habermas’s terminology, this is the process by which society as a “system” intrudes into society as a “lifeworld” (Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., 1984a and 1987).

¹³ These are social institutions that allow for open and rational debate between citizens in order to form public opinion. Ideally the public sphere should be open to all, and agreement should be secured through the force of better argument, rather than through any exercise or threat of physical force. The debate can be conducted face to face or through exchanges of letters and other written communications. It may be mediated by journals, newspapers and electronic forms of communication (Edgar, 124).

¹⁴ This is the condition for free and transparent communication. What is important about these conditions is that there is no imbalance of power between the participants in the dialogue. Meaning, nobody can force one’s opinions upon anyone else, or prevent them raising problems or challenges, while at the same time not excluding somebody from the discussion. When these conditions were held, agreements that the participants arrived at would be based upon the force of rational argument alone (Ibid., 84).

of the “colonization of the lifeworld”¹⁵ by the system. Habermas believed that by employing critical theory¹⁶, which is a melding of psychoanalysis and Marxism grounded on labor, the hidden motives and ideologies which control our rationality and actions will be brought out in the fore and be analyzed. In psychoanalysis, on the one hand, the task is to expose and bring to the patient’s awareness the memory of the (traumatic) experience that is the source of the symptoms for his behavior. Thereby, bring the patient into full control of his body. On the other hand, the task of Marxism is to expose the inevitability that conceals the social processes that serve to sustain socio-political domination and economic exploitation. In the same manner as psychoanalysis, Marxism will bring the person into full autonomy and thereby, make his own purpose. As Habermas and the rest of the Frankfurt School saw the influence of technical consciousness, reflective of capitalism, permeating and controlling the lifeworld¹⁷ of the communicating people, the very first thing to resolve, therefore, is to determine how the “controlling power” works. Habermas sees that labor and interaction presupposes language, wherein language serves as the “vehicle” for them to be possible. With this, actions that were reflective of communication can be “linguistified” (put into words). Furthermore, anything that can be put into language becomes understand-able. With critical theory, Habermas introduced his Communicative rationality (reason) to understand the language

¹⁵ The process by which individual freedom is undermined in more complex societies, as large-scale social processes become increasingly autonomous and restrict the actions of those who are subject to them. In Habermas’s terminology, this is the process by which society as a “system” intrudes into society as a “lifeworld”. Colonization may be seen as an undesirable consequence of the growth in complexity of societies, and the problems that the organization and stabilization of those societies present (Ibid., 17).

¹⁶ It is an approach to the analysis of society that seeks to offer a political evaluation of that society, and to guide political practice. The term was coined by the Frankfurt School thinker Max Horkheimer in 1930s and adopted by Habermas. Habermas offers psychoanalysis, as well as Marxism, as models for critical theory (ideology critique). Later he abandoned this. Critical theory is thus now concerned with exploring what Habermas identifies as the “pathologies” that come about through the inevitable expansion of systematic organization in complex societies, and the concomitant erosion of scope for communication and critical discussion. Pathologies include a loss of meaning in everyday social life, the undermining of moral and other values, and the psychological maladjustment. (Ibid., 33-36)

¹⁷ The stock of skills, competences and knowledge that ordinary members of society use, in order their way through everyday life, to interact with other people, and ultimately to create and maintain social relationships. But when Habermas developed the concept further, it began to gain a certain independence from that of Husserl and Schutz. The lifeworld is not a mere stock of cultural resources, but part of a complex process of interaction, through which we use language to establish, maintain and repair social relationships to others. It is not merely a resource upon which one draws, for it is also something that itself may be disputed. It is fluid, and as much the focus of negotiation between people as it is the focus of taken-for-granted agreement. Habermas argues that one form that the development of societies can take is through what he calls the “rationalization of the lifeworld”. (Ibid., 90)

of humans, that is, to understand the way humans reason out and act. Consequently, this “understanding” will emancipate the rationality and acts of (the communicating) man, and in turn make his life free, free to accord it to his own choosing.

In Habermas’s concept of Communicative reason, he believed that communication does not only disseminate information as many earlier theories of language held. Habermas took into account of the fact that we humans do numerous things using communication. For instance, communication is a way of doing something, like commanding, threatening, cursing, blessing, etc. However, communication is not just made out of impulses.¹⁸ They carry with them reasons why they were in the first place communicated. At the same time, genuine communication works within the parameters of reason. They must be sound. Therefore, one can say that communication works well with people who are reasonable and who can use/understand the language well. Such are the prerequisites of Habermas for his Theory of Communicative Action.

IV. Introducing Communicative Action

Communicative Action entails the establishing and/or maintaining of a social relationship between two or more individuals via some sort of appeal to ordinary language as such actions are meaningful. In all such action is an attempt to establish communication between two or more people, if it fails, one or another of the people involved will resort to more language to make sense of what is happening. So while we communicate not just information between people, it can also be a way of doing something in the world. Habermas, therefore, identifies three functions that Communicative Action could perform. And they are – to convey information, to express one’s own opinions and feelings, and to establish social relationships with others.¹⁹

To elaborate on the Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas identified three functions of it as he analyzed the attributes of language. The first of these attributes is that language (communication) presupposes a propositional attribute.

¹⁸ See Edgar, 22.

¹⁹ See Edgar, 22.

Habermas believed that in a dialogue, the one in the dialogue must communicate the truth of the objective, physical world (Wahrheit). In other words, any discourse that may come from the exchanges of those who converse in language must stand on factual matters. In the same manner, it is presumed that those who share the same language must have a common understanding about the (physical) world so that they can employ it (language) in the same way.

As language has an attribute of expressiveness, the second property of Communicative Action then highlights the “inner world” of the speakers, or what the speakers (in the dialogue) think/feel about the matter at stake (Wahrhaftig). Habermas believed that those who were communicating were not just talking about the physical world (world of facts), but were also communicating about their “inner worlds” (their personhood), and their personal views in life (opinions, judgments). For Habermas, this second criterion of Communicative Action speaks about the world of the subject, the person’s internal world.

Third, in Communicative Action dialogue does not only discuss the facts of the world (physical), or bring the speaker’s world (inner world) in the dialogue, but it also expects to create a better world. Communication for Habermas is made, therefore, as a conduit in bringing people together to build lasting relationships (Richtigkeit), thus, making lives better and the world a better place to live in. In other words, the end product of Communicative Action is not just what one has learned about the objective, physical world, or the subjective, internal world of the one communicating, but also the conversion that happens with the people dialoguing. It is the relationship they established in every moment of communicating. Habermas, in the final analysis, regards the importance of the inter-subjective world, the world of relationships.

When the aforementioned had been satisfied, consensual agreements are made, Communicative Action is realized.

As Habermas recourse to the pragmatic-content of language, he proposed for the validity claim of language in Communicative Action in three-ways to which he called Universal Pragmatics: First, as the speaker of the language should speak the truth, the language used should reflect truthfulness of the (objective) world. Validation is gauge in the propositional level or locutionary. For

instance, one cannot claim something is, if it is not. Or something is not, while it is. Thus, a language that does not speak the truth of the world is immediately a suspect of using Strategic Action²⁰ in the dialogue.

Second, as the speaker should mean what he says, truthfulness is determined in the subject. Validation of the language is found in the expressiveness of the speaker. Habermas believed that the truth of what is being said does not only reside in the object that is being said, but also by the one saying it. In fact the (subjective) person communicating does not only make the objects communicable, but also trustworthy. Sincerity (truthfulness and genuineness), freedom of expression and openness to what the speaker thinks/feels is essential in Communicative Action. Thus, as the speakers are demanded to speak the truth, they are also needed to be truthful. For as the saying goes, "The messenger is also the message". Failure to meet this second requirement in Communicative Action (truthfulness) makes one a suspect of using Strategic Action in dialogue as well.

Finally, as communication is made to also bring about a better relationship with those who are in dialogue, the way to validate the propriety (proper use) of the language used is to posit this in the socio-cultural norm of the communicating persons. Thus, the speaker is not just any more considering the truthfulness of what he is saying, or the sincerity of his expression, but also the effect/s his words will incur to those who hear him (illocutionary²¹). Following the line of thought of Habermas, there is no better result for him than to have consensual agreement every time the speakers would utter their words (dialogue). The appropriateness (normative rightness) of the language being used in the dialogue process – the when and the where the utterance is said matters. This happens only when one fully understands and respects the dialogue-partner by considering the cultural propriety-ness of the utterance one makes. And so, failure to meet this third requirement of Communicative Action (appropriateness/ normative rightness), makes one a suspect of using Strategic Action in dialogue also.

²⁰ This topic will be fully discussed in a separate chapter.

²¹ It is that power of utterance to create a social relationship between a speaker and listener (Jurgen Habermas, "Some Distinctions in Universal Pragmatics," *Theory and Society* 1, no.3 (1976e): 155-67). The idea of illocutionary force was first proposed by the analytic philosopher J.L. Austin when he distinguished what he called speech acts from cognitive utterances, where some facts or opinion about the world is asserted (Ibid., 72).

With this, Habermas advocated the respect of the three-way validation of dialogue, or what he properly called Universal Pragmatics²².

This discourse ethics²³ or the ideal-use of language called Communicative Action, together with the rules to be respected when communicating (Universal Pragmatics), is what Habermas regards as the “rational-tool” that will bring about emancipation to the oppressed, and resolutions to conflicts. As many conflicts were rooted from misunderstandings, biases and prejudices, fears and irrationalities, Habermas saw that it is in Communicative Action that the aforementioned will be resolved or prevented. This is because in Communicative Action, arguments/ positions were laid in the open, challenged, and deliberated so to achieve agreement (consensus). The use of authority or influence has no place here, and is discounted. And when understanding and agreement is achieved by those involved in the dialogue, it becomes easier for them to see/ treat each other as “an-other”, different yet equals.

V. Communicative Action vs. Strategic Action

Habermas had laid down in the aforementioned the “ideal-speech situation”²⁴. However, as language acted does not always reflect the truth, or makes the speaker sincere, or bring people to agreement, Habermas distinguished Communicative Action with other types of speech-acts to which he regarded as Strategic Action(s). In Strategic Action, he said, persons speak/act in order for them to achieve their desired results via the most efficient means. While this could be useful in projects done to material things

²² It is the theory of the skills and competences that human beings need in order to be able to communicate. For Habermas, a reconstruction of such competences also provides and explanation of how human beings produce and maintain the fabric of everyday life. This is an example of what Habermas calls a “reconstructive science” i.e., he seeks to reconstruct the rules that competent agents must follow in order to communicate with each other (See Edgar, 163-166).

²³ It is the normative theory that is implicit in the rules of communication that are presupposed by competent members of society. Habermas’s contention is that, having outlined in Universal Pragmatics the kinds of knowledge and skills that are required by ordinary people to communicate each other, and thus to create and maintain social relationships, one can recognize a strong moral dimension to these rules [see Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 43-115].

²⁴ Ideal speech situation is the conditions for free and transparent communication. The concept played an important role in the early formulations of Habermas’s theories of Communicative Action and Universal Pragmatics (Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979a), 1-68; 1984a; 1987).

to achieve optimum result/s, however, to use the same action/motivation to social relationships is a different case. Strategic Action leads the actor/s to consciously/intentionally oppress and subjugate others (or dialogue partner) just to meet their needs/expectations (or to win the argument). This particular form of Strategic Action is what he calls an Overtly Strategic Action, an example of which would be a court proceeding or a game. Strategic Action can also bring the actor/s to unconsciously/consciously oppress and subjugate others (or dialogue partner). This, on the other hand, is what Habermas regards as Covertly Strategic Action, a.k.a. deception. When this is done unconsciously, like in the case when a person is ideologically blind, it becomes an unconscious-form of deception. When deception is done consciously, as in the case of manipulation and seduction, it is a conscious-form of deception. People, in this sense, were treated as means to some ends.

Putting all of these purposive speech-actions vis-a-vis, Habermas polarized his theory of Communicative Action as the ideal speech-act, wherein actions were done not so much to bring about optimum result/s, than to have agreement between parties resulting to better relationships. In other words, Communicative Action, unlike Strategic Action, would give more importance to the quality of relationships that are affected by the dialogical process, rather than accomplishing each one's target goal. Habermas saw that it is in this way of dialogue that human living will truly flourish (or find resolution to the conflict/s they may be into). This is viable because Communicative Action's paramount concern is consensus-building for quality co-living (coexistence). Like in Strategic Action, Communicative Action also values results; however, it does not measure results primarily in their material value set by those in power. Habermas believed that while material results are important, this becomes secondary only to quality relationships the dialoguing parties could gain when they collaborate and treat each other duly. For Habermas, relationships established, deepened, and nurtured are the true gauge of success more than the products people produce because of some set targets.²⁵ Besides, when people who are supposed to do the task are in agreement, the tasks they set would be made

²⁵ See Edgar 2006: 144-45.

more efficiently and would bring better results.

If Habermas's Communicative Action becomes the ideal speech-act wherein truth, truthfulness, and rightness are the paramount requirements for genuine communication to exist, and by this to arrive at consensus so that better relationships could be achieved, what could still be lacking in this theory that the Judeo-Christian theology on divine communication can supplement in this common project of making better communication lines to bring about a better world to live in?

VI. Divine Communication²⁶

"Divine revelation" is a theological phrase in Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (in Latin: word of God), which technically refers to as "Divine Communication". Accordingly, this is the foundation, inspiration and exemplar of the Church's own communication. The Church's message, however, is not mere information but a person or, more accurately, the people's experience of this person. Such is the impact of Jesus of Nazareth, which made him called by many names: "The Christ," "Lord," "Savior", etc. But one which is particularly a propos to the world of communication is "word," the Word which God has "spoken" once and for all, Jesus Christ.²⁷

Jesus is crucial to Christianity. No Jesus, there is no Christian communication. *Dei Verbum*, inspired and oriented by the experience and thought found in the gospel and letters of John, explains how Jesus is God's Word to the world.²⁸ *Dei Verbum* states that Jesus "speaks the words of God (Jn. 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. Jn. 5:36; 17:4)." It was he who "perfected revelation". Jesus' life and ministry, passion, death and resurrection point God's will to bring about in our world life and its fullness, for to experience Jesus is to experience the God who is Life (cf. Jn. 14:9). When seen in and through the person of Jesus, God's face is one amazing goodness and humanness.²⁹

²⁶ Jose de Mesa, *"The 'Word' That Is Jesus: A Theology of Communication"* (plenary paper presented at Signis World Congress, Chiang Mai, Thailand, October 18, 2009). This chapter is a presentation of the salient parts of Jose de Mesa's treatise on the "Dabar of God".

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ Cf. *Dei Verbum.*, art. 4.

²⁹ De Mesa, 3.

The Jewish metaphor Jesus as God's word would be better clarified if we inquire about the meanings the term "word" represents. This is because the metaphor embodies, describes and underscores the biblical understanding of the way God relates and communicates with us, and how human beings are to receive and respond to the divine communication. In fact, it is from the point of view of its reception that we begin to grasp what it is that God does with His/Her "word".³⁰

Taking into consideration the discipline of hermeneutics and the importance of cultural context in contemporary biblical scholarship, the consideration of taking the Jewish cultural ways of understanding to better understand Jesus as God's enfleshed communication to us becomes reasonable and imperative.³¹

The Jewish concept and term for "word" is *dabar*. *Dabar*'s rich meaning can be understood in three interrelated characteristics. All three reveal something about the meaning of the "word", at the same time, convey why Jesus is the Word God spoke.

A. The Divine Word Jesus is unconditionally and faithfully in solidarity with us

First, *dabar* is a relational concept. Meaning, it is used in the context of relationships, as in the relation-centered culture of the Jews. Because of *dabar*'s relational concept, there is an assumption that there is a speaker or word given, and a listener or word received. *Dabar* is conversational or communicative, and not merely expressive. It portrays some bond between the speaker and listener. This relationality characterizes mutuality and commitment. Statements like "I am your God and you are my people", where the book of Exodus reminds us how God regards His/ Her people as expressed to Moses (Ex. 3:7-8), and "I know my sheep and my sheep know me", where Jesus, the Word of divine relating to humanity, is a shepherd who does not run away when the wolf comes, but rather one who "lays down his life for the sheep" (cf. Jn. 10:11-13). Moreover, this communicative word is intended not just to initiate, but to also strengthen and deepen such relationship. God's word is respectful of human freedom. It does not put down but builds up; it

³⁰ Ibid., 3-4.

³¹ Ibid., 4. Emphasis supplied.

does not enslave, but frees for genuine deep relationship. It is done through fellowship. The letter of John speaks of “announcing ... in order that others may have fellowship” with them and that such “fellowship may be with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn. 1:3). This is the reason why not surprisingly Jesus, as the word of God, is given a name that speaks of an abiding kind of relationship: Emmanuel, the God who is in solidarity with us, and is always with us. Jesus expresses such desire to relate with us not as servants, but as friends. This relational view differs from the Graeco-Roman way of conceiving a detached God, metaphysically existing alone in an absolute manner, unmoved by any external influence.³²

Dei Verbum further describes this kind of relationality as God taking the initiative (Art. 2). God makes the first move, takes the first step to share life and love with us because of sheer divine “goodness and wisdom”. Because there is no external power or presence, the initiative can only come from God. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, this suggests a passion from God for humans. God “speaking” is God’s decision and not at all dependent on human merit, thus, revelation is also unconditional. Consequently, this unconditioned relationality is also inclusivist. The offer of God is extended to all; it is firm and will not be revoked on the way we respond to it. Again this is because it does not depend on our response. As the book of Lamentations would say, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.” “God’s mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.” Likewise, the Parable from Luke describes how God’s word is compassionate and faithful to a failure (Lk. 15:11-24). Love is never withdrawn as it manifests itself as compassionate forgiveness.³³

The Judeo-Christian tradition also insists that God’s unconditional initiative neither implies coercion or manipulation to respond in return. God’s word is an offer, not an imposition. Dei Verbum makes it clear that faith is an entrusting of the whole self freely to God (D.V. 5). However, we must not conceive this word to us as neutral, since it is from God; it has a bias for life and love. This offer is seeking for a genuine life-giving relationship with those to whom it is extended. Revelation is not neutral because it empowers

³² Ibid., 4-5. Emphasis supplied.

³³ Ibid., 6. Emphasis supplied.

peoples to respond affirmatively.³⁴

B. The Divine Word Jesus is revelatory of God who gives life

The second characteristic of *dabar* pertains to the unanimity of the person speaking and the word being spoken. As speaking is a mode of being of the person, this means what is spoken consequentially indicates the person speaking. Conversely, the person is known through the word spoken. If this is what is meant by *dabar*, then the phrase “word of God” in the Jewish cultural idiom is the very Self of God. In other words, the word of God is the God-Self. In the prologue of John’s gospel we read, referring to Jesus as word, “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God” (Jn. 1:1). Thus, the word of God is God “speaking”, and whatever God communicates refers back to God who is communicating. This is true of Jesus Christ. He is speaking, and at the same time, he is God’s speech, the *dabar* of God. As God’s word, the divine is authentically and fully present in his person. *Dei Verbum* elaborates: “To see Jesus is to see his Father (Jn. 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through His whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself...” (*Dei Verbum*, art. 4).³⁵

The second characteristic of *dabar* also prompts us to ask, “What is God communicating to us that reflects on or reveals who He or She truly is?” Or the probably better way to ask is, “what do we experience in what God is saying?” Since it is Jesus who is God’s word, we need to refer back to the ones who had a firsthand experience of him – the first disciples and ask, “What was the content of their experience?” *Dei Verbum* answers this by leading us to the testimony of John: “We announce to you the eternal life which was with the Father, and has appeared to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, in order that you also may have fellowship with us, and that our fellowship may be with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn: 1: 2-3). This eternal life is a reality, which is already here and now (cf. Jn. 6:54). Eternal life in the Bible concerns the quality of life in this world and beyond. The quality of life that is being pertained to here is what the Greek term *zoe* means.

³⁴ Ibid. Emphasis supplied.

³⁵ Ibid., 7. Emphasis supplied.

It is a human life that is meaningful, a life worth living. Comparing it to another Greek term for life *bios* which speaks of mere existence, we can tell that when Jesus spoke, “I have come to bring life, life in its fullness” (Jn. 10:10), he was referring to *zoe*. *Dei Verbum* repeats this thought as an offer of full humanness in its use of the idiom “to share in the divine nature,” that is, to become fully human as God intends. Eternal life, then, is the fullness of life that begins here on earth but not totally experienced in this world because it is rooted in The Eternal, the inexhaustible God.³⁶

The link between the person speaking and the word spoken implies a harmony and consistency between the speaker and what he (she) says. The spoken word becomes a responsible statement from the one who spoke it. Consequently, when one sincerely speaks the truth he (she) becomes trustworthy. *Dabar* connotes integrity.³⁷

C. The Word of God as effective and transformative presence in Jesus

Thirdly, *dabar* denotes action and communication, a deed and a word. It means when *dabar* is spoken an event in history and a spoken/ written word has been made. Thus, *dabar* can be described as an active word or an eloquent deed. It is, therefore, from the perspective of communication, an active communication or a communicative action. Thus, when God speaks, we should think that something is happening or being realized. *Dei Verbum* clarifies further this relationship between deed and word, “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of human beings is made clear to us in Christ, who is the Mediator and at the same time the fullness of all revelation” (*Dei Verbum*, art. 2).³⁸

This imaging of God as *dabar* is not only communicative but also transformative. The creation narrative illustrates this God’s

³⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis supplied.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8. Emphasis supplied.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

marvelous deeds made realized through God's words. Something happens when God says (dabar) something: "Let there be light" and "let there be separation of the land from the waters," then light comes into existence and the separation of the land from the waters happens. In this same accord, references like "thus says the Lord," God speaks," or "word of the Lord", are to be understood as the very Self of God as active in our midst. But among the *dabar* of God, Jesus is the par excellence. Jesus is the active, effective and transformative presence of God's word. The book of Acts sums up Jesus' ministry: "how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). What Jesus does reveals at the same time. Indeed, Edward Schillebeeckx is very apt to regard him "the parable of God".³⁹

VII. CONCLUSION

With the looming and apparent conflicts that we have these days, indeed, there is all the more the need to go back to the dialogue-table. The Theory of Communicative Action of Jurgen Habermas gives us the process-guideline to generate real understanding and lasting consensus. The theory begets a "non-zero sum game", a win-win scenario to the parties involved in the dialogue. However, this is realized only if each dialoguing parties will respect the conditions/criteria proposed in the Theory of Communicative Action. Of course, oppositions and skepticisms whether the theory will work are present (or expected) especially when the atmosphere for dialogue seems implausible, such as in the case where hostility is present, or when opposing parties simply do not want to sit down and talk because of "triumphalist- attitudes", or when truth-claims become hurdles for each party to seek for what is real via dialogue (those who are in power including the Church is not exempted from this), etc. These aforementioned and many other reasons make *Dabar* more relevant, or at least supplementary in the quest for genuine dialogue, understanding, and subsequently agreement. The quality of *Dabar*, wherein, it makes the initiative to dialogue through revelation is an honest trusting move. It is a paramount quality that bridges differences, takes out inhibitions, and builds trust unto each other. In the same way, *Dabar* like the Theory of Communicative

³⁹ Ibid. Emphasis supplied.

Action, does not impose but invites those in the dialogue to share in the “life”, in the offer of love. This love begins by listening, and in turn grows with the feeling for the other. It accepts whoever we are; it is compassionate in its truest sense. This Dabar will continue to “relate” with us, as love is steadfast and unconditional. Dabar will continuously communicate; however, we do not wish to communicate back. This is that kind of communication that is brought out from within, for the nature of Dabar is life full of love. This is the call that Dabar demands from us – to communicate the same message to others. So that by the influence of the spirit of Dabar, we may incarnate the message and bring about genuine change, full of life, filled with inspiration, and in fellowship.

Finally, this discourse had pointed out how modernity made us rationalize in a peculiar manner, which made us perceive things in such way, and in turn made us act accordingly. Likewise, it had also shown how it becomes difficult for a person to take notice of the ideologies that surround him, making it difficult for him to shield himself from the “controls” that imprison him to act freely, creatively, lovingly. Jurgen Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action, a product of the Frankfurt School’s Critical theory, opened us a door that will make these things possible. He argued that it is through language and communication, rendered by a person, that one could possibly act freely, and creatively. Indeed, fully human.

Likewise, the Judeo-Christian Dabar (word of God) showed us how God throughout time actively communicated to us, that is, God had communicatively acted on us through the Word-made-flesh. This “type” of communication is one that gives life – free, creative, inclusive, unconditional, bias for quality life, transformative, empowering, and most of all reflective of love. Truly, divine.

We need both of these at this time. We need to communicate.

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