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# To Whom Am I Speaking? Communication, Culture, and Fundamental Theology

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## Abstract
Vatican II's *aggiornamento* sought to reach out to the modern world with the message of the gospel in a way that was intelligible to the contemporary world. Fundamental theology was expected to play an important role in this process, but it has not been very successful in doing so. Set in this context, this article attempts to rethink the nature of fundamental theology. It uses a communication perspective to make a principled distinction between theology and fundamental theology, and goes on to clarify their tasks.

## Keywords
communication and culture, divine–human communication, interreligious dialogue, theology and communication, theology and fundamental theology

The Second Vatican Council arose from a desire to reevangelize the world. The administrative expression of that spirit resulted in setting up such pontifical councils as the Council for Culture, for Interreligious Dialogue, and for Promoting New Evangelization. But a fundamental theology that can intellectually equip the Church to reach out to the world is languishing.[1] After an enthusiastic beginning, fundamental theology as a discipline is, in the words of Gerald O'Collins, "threatened with non-existence"

1. Although the Council itself does not use the term "fundamental theology," its teachings are permeated with the spirit of reaching out.

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and needs to be rethought today.[2] An important contributing factor is, among other things, the ambiguous nature of this discipline. Although today the discipline is considered "strictly theological," earlier practitioners of fundamental theology were ambivalent as to whether it was primarily philosophical or theological.[3] And if this discipline needs to be rethought, it must begin with reconsidering the nature of the discipline itself. My article aims to explore this question afresh from the perspective of communication theory.

The reason for adopting a communication perspective is this: If the task of fundamental theology is to reach out to the world, and if reaching out is an act of communication, then understanding communication can help us understand the nature of fundamental theology. Key concepts of Christian faith are also matters of communication: revelation is God's self-communication to human persons; evangelization is communicating the Good News to fellow human beings. Further, communication is at the heart of interreligious dialogue, an important theological concern in the contemporary world.[4] Interdisciplinary communication can help overcome false lines of academic specialization and the intellectual fragmentation that follows.[5] Interdisciplinary communication has a special significance for fundamental theology, because the desire to interrelate the divergent systems of thought prevalent in the contemporary world is among the factors that led to the emergence of this discipline.[6]

The article is divided into two main parts. It first draws on various sources in the fields of communication and philosophy to outline some basic ideas involved in effecting communication. A key idea, borrowed from existentialist thinking, is that communication is not something that takes place in the abstract, but is something rooted in the lives of the communicator and the addressee. Culture understandably, then, plays a crucial role in the encoding of the message by the communicator and the decoding of it by the addressee.[7] The second part draws out some implications of these ideas for religious communication.

2. Gerald O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Toward a New Fundamental Theology* (New York: Oxford University, 2011) vii.
3. P. J. Cahill, "Fundamental Theology," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 19 vols., ed. Bernard L. Marthaler and Gregory F. LaNave (Detroit: Gale, 2003) 6:26–27, at 26.
4. Thomas Merton and David Krieger have understood the importance of communication for interreligious dialogue. See Pierre-Francios de Bethune, "Monastic Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) 34–50, at 41; David J. Krieger, "Communication Theory and Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30 (1993) 331–53; and Krieger, *The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) 331–54, at 332.
5. Mary Midgley sees philosophy's task to be the relating of different disciplines. See Mary Midgley, *Wisdom, Information, and Wonder: What Is Knowledge For?* (1989; New York: Routledge, 1995) esp. 70–73.
6. René Latourelle, "Introduction to the English Language Edition," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 1994) xiii–xvi, at xiii.
7. "Culture" is understood as a humanly constructed environment as opposed to the natural environment; it is a human achievement in history and not a given of nature. It is made up

I appeal to communication theory to distinguish theology from fundamental theology and to examine the implications of this distinction for understanding each of the three (propaedeutic, apologetic, and dialogical) tasks of fundamental theology.

Beginning an article by formulating a theory of communication is an unusual procedure. Ordinarily, one begins with a review of the relevant literature. But one has only to open a widely used textbook like that of Em Griffin's *A First Look at Communication Theory* to realize that the field of communication is populated with numerous theories, each dealing with something different, formulated for different purposes and with different emphases.[8] We seem to need a theory that can differentiate and relate theology and fundamental theology.

## Communication: The Basics

Communication is constituted by a triadic relationship between the communicator, the message, and the receiver. It involves two different actions: one performed by the communicator, the other by the addressee.[9] The communicator encodes a message in signs and sends it to the receiver, hoping for a particular response. The receiver decodes the message by selectively attending to the available stimuli, interprets it, and responds to it in what seems a fitting manner. Still, the acts of the communicator and the receiver are independent of each other (depicted in Figure 1) otherwise communication would be misunderstood as the communicator (A) transferring his or her message directly to a passive receiver (B); this is known as the bullet theory of communication.[10]

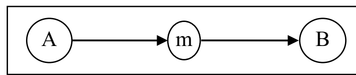


**Figure 1.** Bullet theory (from Schramm, "The Nature of Communication" 22).

Good communicators have always known that the bullet theory is wrong; successful communication depends not only on the communicator but also on the recipient, the addressee. This realization prompted Socrates to compare the one who writes

of diverse components, like art and architecture, science and technology, economic and political organization of society, and above all, language, ideas, and the values underlying these human constructions.

8. Emory A. Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994). This book has at least nine editions. I use the second edition because the chapter on motivation needed for my purpose is not found in some later editions.
9. Wilbur Schramm, "The Nature of Communication between Humans," in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, ed. Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1971) 3–53, at 15.
10. Ibid. 8. For simplicity I have avoided the terminology of "speech acts." I note, however, that the bullet theory of communication has its counterpart in the speech–act theory of J. L. Austin. Paul Ricoeur corrected it by introducing into it the "interlocutionary" act.

down his thoughts to a farmer who scatters seeds without any consideration of the kind of soil on which they would land.[11] Figure 2 below depicts the independence of the actors and their acts.

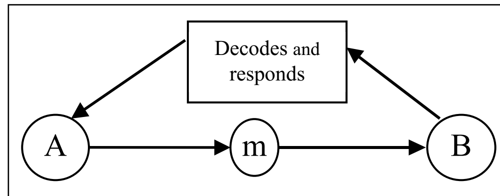


**Figure 2.** Communication as relational (adapted from Schramm, "The Nature of Communication" 23).

The independence of these two actions arises from the fact that the relationship between the communicator and the receiver is not merely a form of interstimulation.[12] Rather, both are persons with their own egos and subjectivity, each living within an encompassing horizon different from that of the other. Each person's lived horizon is made up of a different set of accumulated experiences, values, and prejudices, driven by shared ideas, education, and cultural heritage.

The fact of having such an existential home impacts all three elements of communication. A's message to B has not suddenly dropped from the sky; it arose as a particular episode in A's inner life, within that horizon. One's horizon of accumulated experiences not only provides the communicator with a social, cultural, and linguistic context for the message but also the codes for the message. The addressee, in turn, understands the coded message in terms of her own horizon of accumulated experiences. Wilbur Schramm illustrates the last point with the example of a tribesman who has never seen or heard of an airplane. Such a person "can only decode the sight of a plane in terms of whatever experience he has had. The plane may seem to him to be a bird, and the aviator a god borne on wings."[13] All human communication, whether a discourse (written or oral) or a work of art, then, becomes a doubly mediated process. Figure 2 therefore, needs to be modified by placing the communicator and the addressee within their respective horizons, as shown in Figure 3.

That the action of the communicator is independent of the recipient's action brings about the possibility that a communication might fail. Given the possibility of such failure, the task of communication is to bridge the gap between the source and the destination by aligning them. Different communication theorists use different terms

11. Plato, *Phaedrus* 276.
12. Robert E. Park, "Reflections on Communication and Culture," *American Journal of Sociology* 44 (1938) 187–205, at 189. "Interstimulation" is the automatic result of stimuli being present without any personal involvement, e.g., two people getting warmth merely by occupying the same bed.
13. Wilbur Schramm, "How Communication Works," in *Basic Readings in Communication Theory*, ed. C. David Mortensen (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 28–36, at 31.

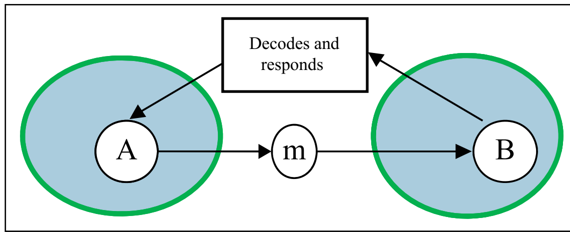


**Figure 3.** A and B situated within their horizons.

for this alignment. Schramm uses the imagery of "tuning" the source and destination to each other, in the manner of a radio transmitter and receiver.[14] Barnett Pearce talks about "Coordinated Management of Meaning" (CMM) where the "term *coordination* is used to call attention to the fact that whatever we do does not stand alone."[15] No matter the terminology used, the alignment of the source and destination is essential to successful communication. An act of reporting is successful when it is understood as a report; an act of persuading is successful when the addressee is persuaded.[16] The task of communication, therefore, is to overcome the distance between the source and the destination.[17] Aligning the source and the destination of the message is the essence of communication.

## *The Forces at Work in Communication*

The autonomy of the addressee from the source of communication enables one to see the twin forces at work in communication, which could be called the driving force and the engaging force, respectively.

When this motivation is effective, there is an urge to communicate—a sense of "ought" or "must" (e.g., "I *ought* to write that letter this week"). The logic of "ought" is known as deontic logic as opposed to the logic of "is-ness" (e.g., "I *wrote* that letter this week). According to Pearce, the logic of communication is deontic.[18] Motivation, with its deontic logic, is the driving force of all communication. Besides providing an urgency to communicate, motivation also shapes the content to be communicated; where motivation is lacking there can be chatter but no message, and where there is no

14. Ibid. 31.
15. Barnett Pearce, "The Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)," in *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication*, ed. William B. Gudykunst (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2005) 35–54, at 50.
16. In speech–act theory, the act of reporting is called "illocutionary act"; understanding it as a report is considered "perlocutionary act," inasmuch as it is the impact produced on the hearer by the act of reporting.
17. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1974) 4.
18. Pearce, "The Coordinated Management of Meaning" 40.

message there is no communication. Where a message and the urge to communicate are present, the communicator is ready to transmit the message.

This internally generated tension makes the communicator poised to express him- or herself, not unlike a drawn bow ready to shoot. But the realization that the addressee is an autonomous "other" does not permit the communicator to "shoot"; one's communication has to be controlled, guided, and channeled, so as to engage the addressee. Engaging the addressee involves restraint by the communicator, such that there is "a tension between holding one's own position and listening while being profoundly open to the other."[19] It is a matter of having a message to communicate while still acknowledging the recipient as distinct. William Gudykunst sees the resulting tension as between empathy with the other and respect for the otherness of the other.[20] Empathy without respect can lead to condescension, and respect without empathy can lead to distancing. In the process of respectfully engaging the other, the communicator's "ought" dimension shifts: "the force of the deontic logic (the sense of what I 'ought' to do) shifts from intrapersonal to interpersonal"[21]—from being completely driven from within one's own horizon to submitting to the restraining force of another horizon.

A similar tension operates in the recipient. On the one hand, the message that enters the recipient's consciousness has an external source (the communicator's subjectivity), possessing a meaning independent of what the recipient might read or understand. Still, the recipient can receive the message only through her own subjectivity, accumulated experiences, and tradition. Inasmuch as the message has an external source, the recipient must reach out beyond her own subjectivity and enter into the horizon of the communicator. This tension between the externality of the message and the necessity of the recipient's subjectivity may be seen as the struggle between otherness and ownness. The former experiences all spatial and temporal distance as estrangement; the latter tends to make all understanding an extension of self-understanding.[22] Thus, just as the communicator attempts to engage the addressee by being sensitive to her horizon, the addressee goes beyond the meaning that is projected from within her horizon to genuinely listen to the communicator by entering into that person's horizon.

This entry into the horizon of the other, however, does not entail the attempt at the impossible task of fleeing one's own horizon. The seemingly impossible task becomes possible with the realization that, while accumulated experiences remain different, commonalities exist. And this common area holds the key to successful communication; it provides a point of access whereby one can enter into the horizon of another. As Schramm recognized,

19. W. Barnett Pearce and Kimberly A. Pearce, "Combining Passions and Abilities: Toward Dialogic Virtuosity," *Southern Communication Journal* 65 (2000) 161–75, at 168.
20. William B. Gudykunst, "An Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory of Effective Communication: Making the Mesh of the Net Finer," in *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication*, ed. William B. Gudykunst (Thousand Oaks, CA ; London: SAGE, 2005) 281–322, at 298.
21. Pearce, "Coordinated Management of Meaning" 43.
22. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976) 43.

> If the circles have a large area in common, then communication is easy. If the circles do not meet—if there has been no common experience—then communication is impossible. If the circles have only a small area in common—that is, if the experience of source and destination have been strikingly unlike—then it is going to be very difficult to get an intended meaning across from one to the other.[23]

Figure 3 then gets modified by situating A and B in their respective existential horizons, with some shared area, as shown in Figure 4.

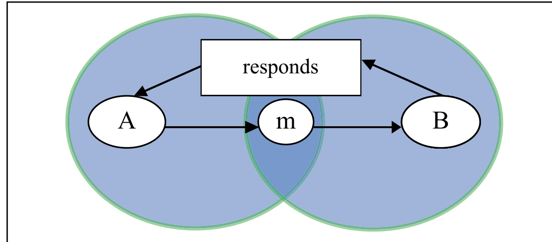


**Figure 4.** Overlap of two horizons.

## *Dynamics of Communication: The Hermeneutic Circle*

Managing the tension between the source and the destination of communication is a dynamic process captured in the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle indicates that all understanding by the recipient of a message begins with the projection or anticipation of some meaning into the message conferred by one's own horizon of accumulated experiences. Recall Schramm's example of a person who has neither seen nor heard of an airplane decoding a sighted plane. Such projected meaning, however, is provisional, to be either confirmed or corrected by one's actual encounter with the otherness of the message. Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it this way: When a person is trying to understand a text, some initial meaning "emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. The working out of this fore-project, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there [in the text]."[24] The initially projected meaning, then, is only a starting point; it may be revised as the communication proceeds. All communication, therefore, involves a reciprocal process that Ricoeur calls the "interlocutionary act."[25] Every turn in this act is a crucial link to the next, elicited just as the present one was elicited by the last.[26]

The result of the reciprocal movement is that the initial commonness (Figure 4) either expands or contracts. The idea of commonness is so critical that Schramm considers it

23. Schramm, "How Communication Works" 31.
24. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 236.
25. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* 15.
26. Pearce and Pearce, "Combining Passions and Abilities: Toward Dialogic Virtuosity" 171.

one of communication's defining features. By tracing the word "communication" from its Latin roots, *communis* (common), Schramm says that communication is an attempt to establish shared ground. The establishment of this shared ground begins with an antecedent commonness that the communicator discerns in the addressee; through the mutual exchange that takes place in communication, the initial commonness gets modified. If the process of exchange goes well, the common area shared by A and B grows, and a "fusion of horizons" obtains, replacing the initial strangeness with familiarity.[27]

## Theology and Fundamental Theology

In describing the nature of fundamental theology in terms of communication, I begin by noting that fundamental theology is a 20th-century successor to the older traditions of natural theology and apologetics; its task is to provide a "propaedeutic path to faith."[28] Besides the propaedeutic and apologetic tasks, a third task, with more constructive roots, has emerged as an important agenda of fundamental theology: interreligious dialogue.[29] Let us consider how communication provides clarity to each of these tasks.

### *Fundamental Theology as Propaedeutic*

As a propaedeutic path to faith, fundamental theology is continuous with natural theology, which attempts to provide knowledge of God's existence and nature without relying on the authority of the Church or Christian revelation.[30] Since natural theology has been associated with the domain of philosophy, one would expect the same of fundamental theology. But the initial discussions on whether fundamental theology is a philosophical or a theological discipline were settled in favor of theology. And for good reason. According to O'Collins, fundamental theology is a "genuinely theological discipline that does its work 'from the inside,' as an exercise of Christian faith seeking to understand, to promote justice, and to assist worship."[31] The phrase "from the inside" is revealing. Modern philosophy thought of itself as working "from the outside," from some kind of an Archimedean point outside all received traditions and beliefs systems. Michael Buckley's magisterial study has shown that an outside

27. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 273. Gadamer's explicit concern is with the horizon of the past and the present, but it seems equally applicable to two contemporary horizons.
28. Pope John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* no. 67, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.
29. O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* vii.
30. David Tracy, "The Necessity and Insufficiency of Fundamental Theology," in *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Gerald O'Collins (New York: Paulist, 1982) 23–36, at 31; Jean-Pierre Torrell, "New Trends in Fundamental Theology in the Postconciliar Period," in *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology* 11–22, at 14.
31. Gerald O'Collins, "Vatican II and Fundamental Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74 (2009) 379–88, at 379.

approach is not merely inadequate as a propaedeutic to theology but that such an approach even contributed to the emergence of modern atheism.[32] Fundamental theology could not therefore adopt an outside approach. But this view of philosophy as an outside view is no longer a viable option in the wake of Heidegger, Gadamer, and others in the continental tradition and later Wittgenstein, Quine, and others in the analytic tradition.[33]

There is also the recognition that stalwarts of faith like Thomas Aquinas who brought natural theology to prominence in the Christian tradition did not set faith aside while doing philosophy. Although he relied heavily on Aristotle and natural reason in his philosophy, Aquinas went on to modify a number of Aristotelian doctrines to bring them into conformity with revelation.[34] This shows that Aquinas approached philosophy as a Christian believer, and not as an outsider. In spite of taking an inside approach, he was very clear: "theology that is included in the sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy";[35] the latter functioned as preamble to the former—a faith-inspired philosophy. These three factors—that the modern view of philosophy as an outside exploration is no longer seen as viable, that Aquinas's view of philosophy did not subscribe to this outside view, and that the role he assigned to philosophy is expected to be carried out by fundamental theology today—has undermined the argument for not considering fundamental theology as philosophy.

It is a different matter whether contemporary natural theology can function as an effective propaedeutic to faith; its effectiveness is doubtful even if an inside approach like Aquinas's is adopted. One reason is that the contemporary world is very different from Aquinas's 13th-century Europe, where the dominant Augustinian Christianity was being challenged by the emerging Aristotelian philosophy. Since natural theology was an integral part of Aristotle's philosophy, if that philosophy was found acceptable, natural theology could also play the role Aristotle assigned to it. By contrast, ours is a world where "the most divergent systems of thought coexist with none of them managing to dominate the others."[36] Given such diversity of worldviews, it is not surprising that many are inclined to see natural theology as "an empty intellectual enterprise"[37] or, at best, as "natural signs."[38]

32. Michael Buckley, S.J., *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990).
33. For the details of the argument that even the allegedly neutral stance of empirical sciences are ultimately based on faith (a secular faith), see George Karuvelil, "Science of Religions and Theology: An Existential Approach," *Zygon* 47 (2012) 415–37, esp. 423–28.
34. For a list of Aristotelian teachings found incompatible with Christian faith, see John F. Wippel, *Mediaeval Reactions to the Encounter between Faith and Reason* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1995) 14–18.
35. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (hereafter *ST*) 1, q.1, a.1.
36. Latourelle, "Introduction to the English Language Edition" xiii.
37. Daniel Garber, interview with Garry Gutting, *New York Times*, October 5, 2014.
38. C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (New York: Oxford University, 2010).

Can communication theory offer a different starting point for a contemporary propaedeutic to theology? We can begin to answer this question by considering the basis of Aquinas's distinction between sacred doctrine (theology) and a preamble to faith (philosophy). We have already seen that the inside–outside distinction was not the basis of his distinction. Seen from the perspective of communication, it seems clear that his distinction is based on the resources that Aquinas, as the communicator, shares with his addressees. He enumerates three categories of people as his addressees: (1) "the Gentiles," (2) Jews and "heretics," and (3) "us." The first category, which includes "Mohammedans and Pagans," "do not agree with us in recognizing the authority of any [i.e., our] scripture";[39] the only resource we have for communicating with them is "natural reason, which all are obliged to assent to." It is quite different with the second category as "we can argue against the Jews from the Old Testament, and against heretics from the New."[40]

If we transpose Aquinas's three categories (Gentiles, Mohammedans, and Pagans, and "us" for fellow Christians) into the contemporary world, we find two different authors providing two different lists of addressees. One list is that of David Tracy who identifies three kinds of addressees. He calls them three "publics": the "public of the church," the "public of society," and the "public of the academy."[41] Paul Griffiths has another list made up of "religious kin" and "religious alien" (which includes religious believers who do not share one's own religious faith and the "nonreligious" comprised of agnostics, atheists, and naturalists).[42] Griffiths's category of religious kin corresponds to Tracy's public of the church, and Tracy's category of society Griffiths subdivides into two but has no category of academy. Between Tracy and Griffiths, we get four different categories of persons to whom contemporary religious communication needs to be addressed: (1) one's religious kin, (2) the religious alien, (3) the nonreligious, and (4) the academy. Of these the academy is a special category, as its members might belong to any of the three other categories; the academy calls for a certain quality of discourse, not a different kind of discourse appropriate for the other three categories.

Religious communication establishes a spectrum. On one end is the believer addressing his fellow religious kin; on the other is the believer addressing nonreligious recipients. Communication addressed to members of other religions would fall between these two extremes, depending on the degree of proximity to and distance from the communicator's horizon. This is an extremely simplified view; it ignores both the plurality that exists within different religious traditions[43] and the diversity of

39. Thomas Aquinas, *Of God and His Creatures: An Annotated Translation . . . of the* Summa contra gentiles, trans. Joseph Rickaby (St. Louis: Herder, 1905) bk. 1, chap. 2; see also chap. 3 and *ST* 1, q.1, a.8.
40. Ibid.
41. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 3–46.
42. Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, ed. Michael L. Peterson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001) xiv and *passim*.
43. See Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 3–4.

atheisms.[44] It is worth recalling that such diversity of religious and nonreligious worldviews was an important factor in the emergence of fundamental theology. While being fully aware of this diversity, it still helps to see all religious communication in terms of the three broad categories of persons that roughly correspond to the categories addressed by Aquinas.

The first kind of communication, that is, one addressed to religious kin, is done within a maximally shared faith horizon of a religious tradition. Therefore all the conceptual resources available in a particular religious tradition would be available to this kind of communication, the purpose of which is to understand something that is already believed, and to solidify those beliefs. Such is the classical definition of theology, *credo ut intelligam*. Since its starting point is a set of accepted beliefs, Gavin D'Costa is right in seeing theology as "tradition specific" communication.[45] It is tradition-specific in two different ways. First, it is communication addressed to one's religious kin; as such, it seeks to deal with issues that arise in the faith life of one's religious community. By successfully addressing such issues, beliefs get strengthened; or else they get weakened. Second, since it is communication done within a maximally shared horizon, the communicator is free to use all the conceptual resources available in the shared tradition for addressing issues.

If theology is religious discourse done within a maximally shared horizon of the communicator and the addressee, then, understandably, shared territory would be relatively minimal in communication with nonbelievers or naturalists and comparatively more with religious outsiders or followers of others religions. Accordingly, conceptual resources available for communicating the message would also be minimal when addressing nonbelievers and more when addressing followers of other religions—although this "more" will be less than what is available in communicating with religious kin. The overall purpose of communicating with outsiders would be not so much to seek understanding of the accepted faith as to reach out to them in the spirit of *intellego ut credam*; it is to "allow everyone to come to a certain understanding of the contents of faith."[46] If theology is defined as faith seeking understanding, both of these kinds of religious discourse could be considered faith seeking acceptability. This might well be taken as the definition of fundamental theology, if acceptability is qualified as rational, ruling out coercion and allurements. Acceptability is the guiding theme of the apologetic strand of fundamental theology (to be addressed in the next section), and it is by being rationally acceptable that it becomes a propaedeutic to theology. In short,

44. These include the atheism of Sam Harris that is suffused with Buddhist spirituality (*Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014]); the "soft atheism" of Philip Kitchner (*Life after Faith: The Case for Secular Humanism* [New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2014); and the crusading atheism of Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006]).
45. D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions* 3. Michael Amaladoss makes a similar observation, although he sees the tradition-specific character as a limitation of theology. See Amaladoss, "The Limitations of Theology," *Vidyajoyti Journal of Theological Reflection* 51(1987) 521–29, at 527.
46. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* no. 42.

the distinction between theology and fundamental theology is best seen in terms of the difference in the destination or the addressee and the resulting difference of resources available for communicating the message. The outward focus of fundamental theology makes it truly a "discipline on the boundary" engaged with disciplines and people who are not within the boundary of one's faith tradition.[47] It emerged in response to the changed boundary conditions, that is, the cultural impact of new disciplines and the diverse religious and nonreligious worldviews present in the world today.

Distinguishing theology from fundamental theology in terms of the addressee might seem to present a serious lacuna. Many contemporary Christians face the serious questions and doubts about their faith as their nonreligious counterparts.[48] Fundamental theology, therefore, cannot be addressed only to outsiders. This prompts Tracy to simultaneously address all three publics (addressees in communication).

In terms of communication theory, however, this flattening of differences between addressees leads to another difficulty. Both the communicator and the addressee seem to be in the same boat, having doubts and questions about faith, but with no message to communicate, or at least lacking motivation to do so. I noted that communication involves some motivating force, giving rise to a sense of duty. Where does this "ought" come from? According to Aquinas, it comes from one's acquaintance with God[49]—for example, Paul's, which led him to exclaim, "Woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16 RSV). The prophets of the Hebrew Bible felt impelled to speak because of their encounter with the Divine, sometimes against their own will. In each of these cases, the motivating force is an experience of, or an encounter with, the Divine, the sharing of which the communicator takes to be an imperative for the good of the other. If the believer and nonbeliever alike face similar doubts about faith, the communicator no longer has a message that she feels obliged to communicate. This, then, leads to the following dilemma: we must either abandon the very possibility of religious communication in this situation (since there is no message that truly obliges) or deny that the believer is in the same boat, that is, deny that fundamental theology is addressed to the believer.

This unattractive either/or can be avoided by adopting the "daisy model" of communication suggested by Pearce, the fundamental insight of which is that the addressee of any communication in a pluralistic context such as ours is seldom a single person or a homogeneous group. Even when a communication is explicitly between two persons, A and B, other persons and groups are rarely absent. The "daisy model" of communication

47. René Latourelle, "Fundamental Theologian," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* 320–23, at 322.
48. Rino Fisichella, "Fundamental Theology II: Whom Is It For?," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* 332–36, at 335.
49. This follows from Nicholas Lash's rendering of *ST*, 1a, q.2, prologue, "principalis intentio huius sacrae doctrinae est, Dei cogitionem tradere" as "the fundamental purpose of revelation, preaching, catechesis and theology was to communicate acquaintance with God" (Nicholas Lash, "Considering the Trinity," *Modern Theology* 2 [1986] 183–96, at 187).

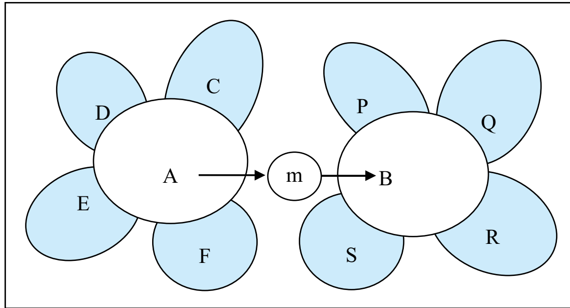


**Figure 5.** Daisy model (adapted from Pearce, "Coordinated Management of Meaning" 47).

theorizes on this fact.[50] The idea is that in addressing B, the main addressee, A is simultaneously saying something to C, D, E, and F. Pearce gives the example of a judge pronouncing his judgment in the courtroom. The judge's primary addressee may be the accused, but the judgment is also addressed to many others, including one's peers (other judges), journalists, fellow citizens, potential criminals, and so on. Figure 5 depicts this scenario.

Seen in these terms, theology's primary addressee would be fellow believers; the religious outsider and nonbelievers would be the secondary addressees. These roles, however, are reversed in fundamental theology. The implication is that although communication is always a matter of tailoring the message to suit the addressee, the very fact that secondary addressees are always potentially present in the background demands that the tailoring process not be allowed to damage the fabric. While the primary addressee does make a difference in terms of what transpires in a communication, the partners must not be insincere or false, as the secondary addressees would expose the duplicity. This would lead to a breakdown of communication. Perhaps it is this danger that prompted Pope Francis to warn against making the Church into a "compassionate NGO" that fails to proclaim Jesus Christ. A compassionate NGO may deliver an acceptable message to the secular world, but a message far removed from the faith of the believer. Something similar can be said about Hick's view that the unique and particular features of Christian faith, such as the dogmas of the Incarnation and the Trinity, are historical accretions that need to be deemphasized.[51] Hick's tendency to downplay the specific features of Christian faith is also seen in his aversion to missionary work and religious conversions.[52] These may be music to the ears of those who consider themselves "spiritual but not religious" but jarring to those Christians who are motivated to reach out to the poor and the dispossessed after the example of the Incarnate One.

50. Pearce, "Coordinated Management of Meaning" 47.
51. I have dealt with this in detail in my "Absolutism to Ultimacy: Rhetoric and Reality of Religious 'Pluralism,'" *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 55–81, at 74.
52. See n. 84 below.

## *Fundamental Theology and Apologetics*

Like faith seeking rational acceptability, fundamental theology is in clear continuity with the classical apologetic tradition of defending Christian faith. But there are important differences. The first is an attitudinal difference. Apologetics often adopts a confrontational, polemical attitude, whereas fundamental theology adopts an attitude of dialogue and friendly appeal to reason. A second difference is that apologetics is rather ad hoc in character, determined by the terms of the polemic or debate. Fundamental theology, in contrast, seeks a more comprehensive approach.[53] This becomes necessary in the context of the unprecedented secularization of the social and political structures in places where Christianity once had a dominant voice but is now less hospitably received.[54] As a result, the credibility of even such central Christian categories as "God," "divine revelation," and "faith" are called into question. As Heinrich Fries has put it, "today's questions are not about this or that individual aspect of Christian faith, today's questions are about the foundations of faith that precedes everything."[55] This situation, unlike that of classical apologetics, calls for a comprehensive, systematic approach.

*Nature of Divine–Human Communication.* Although the communication theory outlined in this article does not establish the credibility of the key categories of Christian faith, it goes some way in helping us understand the nature of revelation as divine–human communication. We have seen that all human communication is a doubly mediated process—mediated through the horizons of the communicator and the recipient. Since horizons are made up of accumulated experiences, not only of individuals but also of groups, we could well say that the message is mediated through culture. The communicator encodes the message using resources available in a given culture, and the addressee decodes it by turning to her own culture for signals.[56] A cultural element, therefore, becomes inescapable in any communication, whether interhuman or divine–human.

But there is something special about divine–human communication. As we saw, horizons are made up of the distinct funds of experience accumulated by human beings in the course of living their lives. Inasmuch as their bodily existence is in space and time, and horizons are made up of experiences, horizons are also the necessary limits arising from our bodily character. If a message were to come from a source beyond space and time, however, then it would be communicated directly without the mediation of a horizon. Divine communication would be a case in point, because in a Christian understanding God transcends space and time, offering insight as to why mystics tend to describe their experience as direct. Teresa of Avila compares the senses

53. O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 5; John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* no. 67.
54. Latourelle, "Introduction to the English Language Edition" xiii–xiv.
55. Heinrich Fries, *Fundamental Theology* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1996) 5.
56. Gudykunst, "An Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory" 284.

(the source of empirical knowledge) to doors, and talks of God entering the "centre of the soul without using a door."[57] Though not as explicit as Teresa, Ignatius of Loyola alludes to a source of divine knowledge that is independent of the senses.[58] This idea of the directness of divine communication can be traced back to Augustine,[59] and perhaps beyond. The same principle of direct communication makes immediacy applicable not only to divine revelation but also to human communication with the Divine. This prompts the psalmist to say, "Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, You know it completely" (Ps 139:4 NRSV).

On the other hand, divine communication to human beings is direct only in a comparative sense. Compared to the two horizons involved in interhuman communication, divine communication has only one horizon. The source of divine communication may be undistorted and direct, but the human receiver still remains within a specific horizon. Unlike human communication that involves a double filtering through two different horizons, so to speak, divine communication has only a single filtering at the receiver's end. Thus the receiver's own subjectivity veils the message. Rahner's paradoxical expression "mediated immediacy" captures the character of divine–human communication well.[60] God's immediacy is mediated through the risen Jesus. So divine communication entails both an immediate and mediate quality that communication theory bears out: it is immediate inasmuch as the source of the message lacks a space–time horizon, but it is mediate inasmuch as the recipient receives the message within a lived horizon in space and time. To the extent that the believer's horizon includes the risen Lord, Rahner's theological point is a specific application of this mediation.

Since direct communication is rather rare in human-to-human communication,[61] understanding divine–human communication poses its own problems. (I discuss this in the next subsection.) While communication theory does not enable us to establish the credibility of culture-dependent communication, it can make us aware of the extra effort required to understand this sort of communication. Let me illustrate this with an example. A few years ago the National Geographic Channel televised a documentary

57. Teresa Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Image, 1961) 103; see also 101–2.
58. See his *Spiritual Exercises* nos. 330, 175, and 336.
59. E.g., *Confessions* 10.27.
60. Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Questions on Easter," in *More Recent Writings*, Theological Investigations 4, trans Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 121–33. See also Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 148.
61. Although rare, such communication is not unheard of in human relations. See, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University) 167–68; and H. L. Goodall Jr. and Peter M. Kellett, "Dialectical Tensions and Dialogical Moments as Pathways to Peak Experiences," in *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, ed. Rob Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter, and Kenneth N. Cissna (Thousand Oaks, CA; SAGE, 2004) 159–74, at 160. This kind of direct communication would come under the category of what Aquinas calls knowledge by connaturality (*ST* 2–2, a. 45, a. 2).

on stigmata.[62] One point discussed in it was the location of the wounds. The wounds of Francis of Assisi and Padre Pio were on the palms of their hands. But in some 20th-century stigmatists, the wounds were on their wrists. This migration of wounds from palms to the wrists occurred in the case of those familiar with the hypothesis of Pierre Barbet (1925–1995) that Christ's wounds could not have been on his palms but on the wrists, because his palms nailed to the cross could not have supported his body.[63] In the documentary, Joe Nickell of the *Skeptical Inquirer*, commenting on the subsequent migration of wounds in stigmatists, asked why God would change the location of the stigmata after Barbet's book—as if God did not know where Jesus was nailed during his crucifixion!

Communication theory would provide an excellent understanding of the location of the stigmata after Barbet's book and show that Nickell's question about God knowing or not knowing the location of the wounds is completely misplaced. To understand the changed location of the stigmata, we need to ask three fundamental questions:

1. Who receives stigmata?
2. What is the message of the stigmata?
3. How is the message received?

Concerning the first question, the history of stigmata reveals that not anyone or everyone receives these wounds. Francis of Assisi, the first known stigmatist, was someone deeply in love with Jesus Christ. Any lover or anyone who has studied the nature of love will know the heartfelt longing of the lover to become one with the beloved. Francis's love for Jesus was deep and heartfelt; he wanted to live the life of Jesus in every possible way, experiencing even his bodily wounds, which for him were the ultimate sign of Christ's love.[64] The stigmata he received were the culmination of that longing to be united in love with the Crucified. While there is no reason to rule out there being some imposters among the stigmatists, it remains the case that only those who long to be united with the crucified Lord receive these wounds.

Knowing that these wounds occur only in those who long for union with the Crucified dramatically affects what we take to be their message. Receiving Christ's wounds in one's own body can only mean that God has granted the favor of being united with Christ in his suffering and his saving work attained though the cross. If the message is concerned with

62. "Stigmata," Season 2, Episode 4 of *Is It Real?*, written and produced by Chad Cohen, National Geographic Television, January 4, 2006.
63. Pierre Barbet, *A Doctor at Calvary: The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ as Described by a Physician* (New York: Image, 1953).
64. Julian of Speyer (d. 1250?) in his life of St. Francis (written 1232–1235) tells us that Francis "desired still to endure anew all the sufferings of body and all the agonies of mind so that *every wish* of the Divine Purpose might be more perfectly *fulfilled* in him" (Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols. [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1999] 1:409). Just before this passage Julian tells us that Francis wanted "to be able to make the sacrifice of himself" (409) and "longed to experience the very sweet yoke and light burden of the Master himself" (405).

God's favor in granting one's request to be united with the crucified Lord, how would the stigmatist be able to understand this unless she can recognize that the received wounds are signs of Christ's own wounds? Obviously this recognition would require the wounds to appear in the place where the *stigmatist believes* Jesus was nailed. It has nothing to do with where Jesus was actually nailed, but everything to do with how the stigmatist can recognize the wounds as the wounds of Jesus. Given the message and the manner of its reception, to focus on the location of the wounds before and after Barbet's book, and to question whether God did not know where Jesus was actually pierced is to completely miss the message and mistake the sign for the signified.

*Epistemology of Religion.* If a communication theory can help us avoid misunderstanding divine communication, it can also create serious epistemological difficulties. In the first place, the message seems to be very one-sidedly dependent on culture, making it very difficult to separate the cultural medium from the message. Moreover, culture affects not only religious doctrines but also religious experience. It is well known, for example, that Jews and Muslims, who have strict prohibitions on depicting the deity, do not ordinarily see religious visions, whereas Hindus and Christians commonly speak of having visions.[65] Given this scenario, it is not clear how to proceed from the subjectivity involved in the understanding of the message to examining its objectivity. Examining the truth of the message requires a much more robust epistemology than is available today. Yet the time seems ripe to move in the direction of formulating a new epistemology, as the old kind of epistemology (what Richard Bernstein calls "objectivism")[66] has been discredited even in its preferred niche of the natural sciences since the appearance of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[67] But if this move away from objectivism is to bear fruit, epistemologists need to guard against its opposite temptation, subjectivism, or what Susan Haack has called the "Paris fashions,"[68] a one-sided emphasis on subjectivity in the form of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and the like.[69] Moreover, objectivism continues to dominate epistemologies that focus singularly on the justification of knowledge without paying attention to the undeniable subjectivity involved in the knowing process.[70] In this fluid scenario, if fundamental theology is to carry out its task of establishing the credibility of the Christian faith, and

65. See Caroline Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 35–39.
66. Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983) 8.
67. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996).
68. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993) 1.
69. A good example, though not from Paris, is Merold Westphal, "Hermeneutics as Epistemology," in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999) 415–35.
70. See, e.g., William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1991).

of religious knowledge in general, it will require a holistic epistemology that dynamically links subjectivity and objectivity where understanding and justification function as two wings of a bird that manages to soar toward objectivity, cutting through the undeniable subjectivity of personal, historical, and cultural factors. Such an epistemology remains a task for the future.

## *Interreligious Dialogue, Fundamental Theology, and Theology of Religions*

A third task of fundamental theology is to provide an intellectual framework for interreligious dialogue. While Vatican II reached out to other religions in a spirit of dialogue rather than polemics, the path has not been an easy one. Already by 1987, Felix Wilfred was writing about "dialogue gasping for breath" due to the inadequacy of available theological frameworks.[71] John Hick, one of the pioneers in the field of interreligious dialogue, once complained that we do not conduct our theological controversies well.[72] At least a part of the reason for Hick's assessment, it seems to me, is the lack of clarity regarding the nature of the intellectual framework required for interreligious dialogue. The ambiguity surrounding this issue can be seen in the writings of "pluralists" like Hick. His theory was propagated as a revolutionary move in the theology of religions,[73] but when faced with criticism, he claimed it to be a "philosophical hypothesis,"[74] a "second order theory of dialogue,"[75] without denying the earlier claim that it is theology. Similar ambiguities are also present in the work of David Krieger who attempted to use the framework of communication for fundamental theology. In the context of such an ambiguity, I argue that fundamental theology (as faith-inspired philosophy) and the theology of religions (as faith seeking understanding of the phenomenon of religious diversity) are both required for interreligious dialogue, but their contribution to dialogue is not the same.

*Dialogue and Fundamental Theology.* Pluralists like Hick rightly see that if interreligious dialogue is to take place, a "level playing field," where no religion is considered superior or inferior, is required.[76] But the objectivist paradigm within which he and other

71. Felix Wilfred, "Dialogue Gasping for Breath? Towards New Frontiers in Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Vidyajoyti Journal of Theological Reflection* 51 (1987) 449–66.
72. John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 2.
73. E.g., Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983); John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (New York: Orbis, 1987).
74. John Hick, "The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa," *Religious Studies* 33 (1997) 161–66, at 163.
75. Paul Knitter, "Theocentric Christology: Defended and Transcended," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24 (1987) 41–52, at 45.
76. Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) 110; John Hick, ed., *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 185.

pluralists function leads their quest for the required level playing field away from their own lived horizons to conceptual abstractions (from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism to theocentrism to Reality-centeredness) in search of some supposedly neutral position between the interlocutors.[77] The search for such a neutral, ahistorical matrix enables Hick to consider particularities of different religions as historical accretions to be overcome. Understandably, evangelization and conversion are to be avoided; it is "best to live within the religion that has formed us" and accord the same privilege to others.[78] Although this statement is about other religions, the same logic could be pressed into service for giving the same status to other worldviews and ideologies like humanism and Marxism.[79]

Krieger arrives at a similar conclusion. Basing his model on a theory of communication modeled after Raimon Panikkar's threefold classification of hermeneutics, Krieger presents three levels of communication that are involved in every act of communication.[80] The first level is communication within the boundaries of a horizon, identified as argumentation. As far as religious or cultural outsiders are concerned, this kind of discourse is irrelevant, except for gaining information about the other. A second level is called "boundary discourse," which concerns the "meaning and validity" of the horizon and attempts to establish the unity and continuity of a historical tradition by examining its founding texts and events. Confirmed in my own identity in this process, I reach out to outsiders through proclamation, with a view to converting them to my side, just as the other tries to convert me. Conversion would imply that the other accept the set of rules or the framework by which I determine the validity of my claims. A third level of communication is called discourse of disclosure. Here there is no attempt to convert the other to my set of criteria or the rules that govern my language game, but explores the possibility of transforming the rules by going beyond religions and ideologies.

Krieger has the right intuition that the profound differences between radically divergent horizons of discourse cannot be resolved either by arguments or by proclamation. This intuition leads to the third level where, according to him, "all religions and ideologies are equally true and effective."[81]

This claim (and Hick's similar claim) is problematic because it implies that a Christian should consider her belief system to be on a par with rival ideologies (humanism, naturalism, and so on). D. Z. Phillips has correctly observed in a similar context that believers are under no obligation to compromise their religious outlook.[82] Moreover,

77. See George Karuvelil, "Religious Pluralists: What Are They Up To?," *Journal of Dharma* 35 (2010) 3–22. Hick capitalizes "Reality" to refer to the neutral Reality between Yahweh, Allah, Brahman, etc.
78. John Hick, ed. *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 189.
79. See George Karuvelil, "Absolutism to Ultimacy" 64–65.
80. Krieger, *New Universalism* 45–76.
81. David J. Krieger, "Communication Theory and Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30 (1993) 331–53, at 346.
82. D. Z. Phillips, *Faith after Foundationalism: Critiques and Alternatives* (San Francisco: Westview, 1988) 133.

if these rival ideologies are taken to be on a par, then believers' motivational force for communicating their faith to those beyond their horizon is eliminated. From the perspective of fundamental theology, this approach to interreligious dialogue undermines the discipline's apologetic strand that seeks to reach out to others with a view to showing that Christian faith is a rational choice. And by undermining its evangelical bent, it is small wonder that *Dominus Iesus* found it necessary to say that interreligious dialogue does not replace the Church's evangelizing mission.[83]

If Hick's unacceptable conclusion is rooted in his objectivist epistemology,[84] the roots of Krieger's conclusion lie where discourse within the horizon correlates with argumentation. From the noncontroversial fact that argumentation requires a shared set of assumptions or premises, Krieger goes on to identify those shared premises with people's lived horizons. His conclusion, however, overlooks the fact that a lived horizon is not a rigid category used in argumentation, but is a complex of accumulated experiences, beliefs, and practices. Something like Aquinas's recognition of this complexity would be more accurate. Aquinas's view of natural reason makes it explicit that, in spite of differences, there is something common to all human horizons merely by virtue of their being human.

The communication theory outlined above provides a coherent framework for fundamental theology that does not undermine any of its three tasks. Following Aquinas, it approaches interreligious dialogue in terms of what Christian believers share with others and provides a completely different way of understanding the "level playing field" required for dialogue. A "level playing field" could mean two different things in this context. It could mean a second-order theory of dialogue effective for all who seek to dialogue. (This understanding would make it a neutral formal theory with regard to the content of dialogue and applicable to all kinds of dialogue whether interreligious, intercultural, or economic and political.) The communication theory described in this article offers just that kind of a theory.

A level playing field could also mean the common territory shared by the actual participants in dialogue. This territory could not be neutral in content, as it is an integral part of the respective horizons or belief systems of the dialogue partners. Differing playing fields would exist with differing instances of interreligious dialogues. Dialogue between two Christian denominations, for example, will obviously have more shared doctrinal ground than, say, dialogue between Christians and Muslims; and Christians and Muslims will surely have more religious ground in common than will Christians and atheists. A variety of level playing fields are made accessible in interreligious dialogue, depending on the religious and nonreligious horizons of those who seek

83. *Dominus Iesus* no. 2, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.
84. See n. 86. Though Hick's epistemology is objectivist to the extent that he neglects his Christian faith in his theorizing, there is another side to his philosophy as seen in his "Faith as Experiencing-as," in *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973) 37–52. That the two sides are not properly aligned is more a reflection of contemporary epistemology than of Hick's personal failure.

dialogue. The distinct role of fundamental theology in interreligious dialogue is to provide a framework for communication and explore the substantive commonality shared between religions, since some shared ground is indispensable for successful communication.[85]

*Do Differences Indicate Lack of Commonality?* In exploring the commonality between religions, our communication theory, especially the role of history and culture in communication, suspects that there may be more commonalities than meets the eye. A good example is the often-posited opposition between religions of grace and religions of effort. Buddha's instruction to his disciples to "work out their own salvation" and "walk lonely as a rhinoceros" is often taken to mean that Buddhism is a religion of personal effort, which is then contrasted with Christianity as a religion of grace, as if the two were mutually exclusive.[86]

Two specific problems arise from straightaway pitting these religious perspectives against one another. First, beginning with antagonism, it neglects the role of effort in a grace-based religion like Christianity while forgetting the insufficiency of effort in Buddhism. It is true that the Christian Scriptures emphasize salvation through grace (e.g., Eph 2:9); it is equally true that the same Scriptures also talk about working out one's salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12; see also 1 Cor 9:24–27). This bipolarity of grace and effort is not merely doctrinal; it is also practical inasmuch as Christian spirituality has always emphasized the practical need to actively cooperate with divine grace for one's salvation. Augustine writes, "He who made you without your consent does not justify you without your consent. He made you without your knowledge, but He does not justify you without your willing it."[87] Similarly, when properly understood, the idea of grace may not be absent even in traditional Buddhism[88]—in Mahayana Buddhism grace is explicitly acknowledged.

85. In the midst of the diverse range of commonality between different religions, the common beliefs (if any) shared by all religions vis-à-vis the nonreligious would have a special significance for the apologetic task of fundamental theology addressed to the nonreligious.
86. Conrad Heyers, "Rethinking the Doctrine of Double-Truth: Ambiguity, Relativity, and Universality," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Thomas Dean (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1995, 1997 Indian ed.) 179–88, at 179. Masao Abe draws a similar contrast between Christianity as a religion of faith and Buddhism as a religion of awakening. See Masao Abe, "Response to John Cobb," *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 8 (1988) 65–82, at 65. Hick uses the alleged mutual exclusion between religions to justify his postulate of the Kantian noumenon. See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1989) 234.
87. Sermon 169.13, trans. William. A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. 3, *A Source-Book of Theological and Historical Passages from the Writings of Saint Augustine to the End of the Patristic Era* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1970–1979) 29, excerpt 1515.
88. Marco Pallis, "Is There Room for 'Grace' in Buddhism?," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 2.4 (Autumn 1968), http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/public/articles/Is_There_Room_for_Grace_in_Buddhism-by_Marco_Pallis.aspx.

Second, if grace and effort were exclusive, it becomes hard to understand the emergence of grace in later Buddhism. Shinran, for example, taught that we cannot attain enlightenment by our efforts, but must rely on the grace of Amida Buddha. If the religion of the Buddha were solely a matter of effort, how could such explicit reference to grace emerge later? Perhaps as a contamination of the Buddhist teaching. But rather than see it as contamination, the emphasis on grace and/or effort can also be seen as the communication of a message to suit the prevailing cultural conditions of the day. One would expect to find such changes. A closer look at the context of the Buddha and Shinran shows that historically Buddhism arose at the same time as the Āranykās, the Upanishads, and Jainism, all of which can be seen as revolts against the religious practices where the role of the individual's effort was virtually nothing. The emphasis was on maintaining the cosmic order through the correct performance of rituals. The efficacy of the ritual depended on neither the favor of gods nor the inner disposition of the one performing the ritual; it depended entirely on the precision of carrying out the rituals and uttering the mantras.[89] Seen in this background, Buddha's emphasis on personal effort is a corrective to that cultural situation; the message is the same as Augustine's: God cannot save you without your consent; spiritual well-being is not attained without one's active involvement. This correlation is even more obvious in the case of Shinran who, by his own account, was frustrated at not attaining enlightenment even after 20 years of diligent practice. Prompted by a vision, he becomes a disciple of Honen and eventually comes to advocate salvation through grace.[90]

Some religious differences may simply be matters of communication, but this does not mean that all religious differences are of this kind. Other important differences persist, but they need not amount to contradictions and exclusions.

*Dialogue and Theology of Religions.* A communication perspective enables us to see that the theology of religions has a very different role to play in interreligious dialogue. Earlier I noted that all theology is addressed to one's religious kin seeking to address faith issues of one's religious community and to find answers in available resources. This search is also a defining feature of theology of religions. Its specific concern is with the apparently rival truth claims made by differing religious traditions. Inasmuch as the believing theologian is also an honest seeker, she realizes that there are numerous good and upright people who do not follow a religious path, sometimes despite all efforts to convince them otherwise. It would be impossible for such a theologian to think that a good God will ultimately deprive sincere seekers of the benefits of the faith she regards as true. Theology of religions tries to resolve this tension for the believing community by using resources available to it. Thus D'Costa rightly appeals to a rarely discussed article of the Christian creed—Christ's "descent into hell"—to show how non-Christians may be saved in Christ.[91] This is an example of how Christians may appeal to their own resources to motivate fellow Christians to engage in

89. Anthony Kennedy Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970) 23.
90. See http://www.bcc.ca/jodoshinshu/shinran.html.
91. D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions* 159–211.

interreligious dialogue. Neither insincerity nor double-speak is involved in this theological claim; it coheres with the insight of the daisy model. Since Christ's descent into hell is not among the resources available to the secular world, a theology of religions that relies on this idea would have no value as fundamental theology addressed to the secular world, but it may have some limited value if addressed to other religious traditions, if they have something similar in their traditions. While theology of religions can empower believers to engage in interreligious dialogue, it is not meant for exploring the commonality required for dialogue, as theology is addressed to religious kin, not religious outsiders.

## Conclusion

One of Wittgenstein's lifelong convictions was that conceptual confusions can create havoc in our thinking. I have here attempted to clarify some issues critical to theological thinking. With insights from communication theory, I have drawn out a principled distinction between theology, including theology of religions, and fundamental theology. This distinction helps show how a communication perspective can shed light on the propaedeutic, apologetic, and dialogical tasks of fundamental theology, including the requirement of common ground for interreligious dialogue. Recognizing the inescapable role of culture in communication is crucial for understanding the nature of divine–human communication as well as for exploring the common ground required for interreligious dialogue. Despite communication theory's welcome contribution, however, the apologetic task requires much more epistemological work than is done here.

### Author biography

George Karuvelil, S.J., received his PhD from the University of Delhi and is currently ordinary professor in the Faculty of Theology at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pontifical University of Philosophy and Theology, Pune, India. Specializing in the epistemology of religious experience and mysticism, he has recently published "Indian Secularism and Hinduism," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 78.1 (2014); "Christian Faith, Philosophy, and Culture: The Triumphs and Failures of Wisdom," *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 17.1 (2014); and "Science, Philosophy, and Theology," *JeevaDarshana: Bangalore Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 2.1, 2 (2015). In progress are two works tentatively titled "Realism and Relativism: Toward an Epistemology for the Postmodern World" and "Faith and Reason: An Essay in Fundamental Theology."