COMMUNICATION, MEDIA AND INCULTURATION

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Abstract

This article addresses two dimensions of being open to others, both of which are then related to inculturation, a task shared by the Church and her schools and universities. First, the micro-level of personal communication with other individuals is considered, along with the qualities and virtues that enhance such communication. Second, the focus switches to the broader level of an intelligent and sensitive engagement with the media of communication deployed within contemporary culture. In the final section there is an indication of the bearing on inculturation and the relevance for Christian educators of both effective personal communicative relationships and a critical discernment of culture and its media of communication.

Keywords: Communication, communicative relationships, dialogue, communication media, Christian educators, faith, culture and inculturation.

It is one thing to believe that by being fully open to God's self-communication we make possible the emergence and flourishing of our own authentic identity; that is hard enough. To accept the risk of letting down the barriers we hold up against God and to trust that God both has benign intentions for, as well as supreme knowledge of, who we are and who we can become, with the help of grace, already seems highly risky. Somehow, it seems even more difficult and rash to be fully open to other people, whose goodwill towards us and whose capacity to understand us, we often have good reason to doubt. Yet, this is our calling: to meet God in, through and with the other person. For us to hear and respond to this call – and thus to enter into communion with others – requires us to engage in serious

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communication with a view to being really present to one another. If education is to promote our humanity, and if becoming more human is the necessary path towards participating in the life of God, then a major task of educators is to facilitate, to encourage and to model the capacity to communicate with others. In this paper I draw attention to some aspects of this task by bringing out its demands, complexities and challenges. In part one the focus will be on personal communication and its requirements. In part two a feature of the wider culture is brought into view, one that deserves more attention than it has so far received from faith educators, despite the efforts half a century ago of that far-sighted commentator Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan, 1978; 2010): the impact of new media of communication. Finally, and briefly, in part three it is suggested that the educational task of inculturation – relating the Gospel to a particular culture – a task which is shared between the Church and her schools and universities – has to be both sensitive to the personal dimensions of communication and alert to the significance and implications of the media used in communication.

Kevin Trowbridge distinguishes communication from media in terms that are pertinent to my areas of focus in parts one and two of this paper. '*Communication* is the relational process of creating meaning while *media* refers to the channels through which messages pass from one communicator to another. … Meaning is created through a relational process that involves the interaction between communicators, messages, and channels' (Trowbridge, 2012, pp.325; 327). Thus, in the first section I will concentrate on the human interactions, the 'software' of human qualities, virtues and capacities that are at the heart of communicative relationships, while in the second I attend to the bearing of the 'hardware' of the media employed in contemporary culture on human perspectives and interaction. In the light of parts one and two, I end, in part three, by proposing that inculturation of the Gospel depends on both the fostering of effective communicative relationships at the personal level and the critical discernment of a culture, especially being alert to its media of communication.

1. Communication between persons

Two dangers come to mind when we reflect on interpersonal communication. There is the raw truth of what is inside us and needs to come out. This will be deeply personal and subjective. It may be one-sided. It may be vehemently expressed. It may emerge from pain. It has immediacy and vigour. It comes from below. Its claim is to be authentic, true-to-self, rather than applicable to all. In contrast, there is a carefully honed, precise expression of

truth which has been 'validated' by some tradition as authoritative. This will be more objective than subjective, more universal in scope than particular to individual cases. It comes from above or outside us and claims to be transferable between people.

Both these types of truth can play a valuable part in communication, and both are valid and necessary, but each, taken on its own, is insufficient, because what is lacking in each is the complex and demanding task of entering into the experience and perspective of the other. This is a failure in relationship. In the first case, the person uttering a truth is insufficiently free at that moment from their pain (interpreted broadly) to attend to, to hear and to take fully into account other person(s), their needs and perspectives. At its best, such raw expression conveys a real authenticity, it calls for attention and it invites some reciprocity in response, preferably one that is restrained, sensitive and appreciative. At its worst, it can slip into mere self-indulgence, being both aggressive and defensive at the same time, lashing out in an undiscriminating manner. In the second case, because of their relatively detached and measured language, the person uttering a truth can seem to be insufficiently invested in, or affected by, the truth they utter; they can seem safely 'above the fray' rather than in the midst of the mess of life. They can appear insufficiently in touch with or sympathetic to those they speak to; if so, they fail to elicit a hearing. Their language comes across as abstract and it lacks concreteness or a 'down-to-earth' quality.

We must find ways to reconcile these two sources of truth and to bring them into dialogue because to leave them apart is damaging, damaging to individuals, damaging to traditions, damaging to communion between people, and damaging in that such separation blocks off avenues to a fuller appreciation and understanding of truth. To rely only on the first would leave people trapped by the limitations of their own experience and it would narrow their worlds unduly. To rely only on the second would be to inhibit serious personal engagement with the resources that traditions have to offer, it would prevent ownership and invite inauthenticity, it would undermine the capacity (and the need) for traditions and 'validated' truth-claims to be tested by the reality of people's experiences, to learn from this and to be open to further development.

Disagreement sometimes will be inevitable, but such disagreement does not have to be taken to be deliberately destructive; it can be constructive both in its intention and in its effects. Disagreement is often taken by leaders to be a sign of disloyalty, instead of as a different

understanding of what loyalty requires of us. The expression of disagreement usually calls for courage in overcoming fear of disapproval or of upsetting others. If the disagreement is to be constructive, care must be taken that it is not expressed aggressively. Here the tone of voice, as well as the language used, matters. Furthermore, if the disagreement is to be constructive, then the aim should be to assist in the process of finding a better way forward. Thus, commitment to a cause, about which one cares, is to be combined with civility; the critique offered is concerned with reconciliation rather than victory of one side over another.

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has drawn attention to the conditions necessary for communication to have a chance to flourish: one must believe that genuine consensus is possible; there should be equality among participants, together with freedom from constraint; there should be no premature closure of discussion topics or outcomes; all participants should have voice, respect and attention (Adams, 2006). Nicholas Burbules (Burbules, 1993, p.42) points out the key communicative virtues, which include tolerance, patience, openness to give and receive criticism, readiness to admit one may be mistaken, a desire to reinterpret or translate one's own concerns so that they will be comprehensible to others, self-imposition of restraint in order that others may speak and willingness to listen thoughtfully and attentively.

Many elements play a part in the communicative relationship: presence and posture, tone of voice rhythm and repetition, pace and pausing, cadence and gesture. Communication requires language (or media), together with relationship*;* it is supported or obscured by the exercise of the art and the power as well as by the intentions and clarity of the communicator in addition to the capacity and receptivity of those one wishes to reach. Communication is not a matter of merely broadcasting a message, but of bringing people together. This is best done as a joint activity, with shared effort and with reciprocal exchange. It is important to be alert to the gaps that can occur in attempts to communicate. There can be slippage between what one means to say, the degree to which one manages to say what one means, what the other person thinks should have been said, what the other person thinks was said, what the other person thinks was meant and how others interpret what others tell them was said. Words can change their significance for us according to several factors that exert an influence on their reception: what other words are used along-side them; who is saying them; our relationship to the person saying the words to us; where they are said (in what context); who else is present when they are said; our knowledge of the topic; whether we have prepared ourselves appropriately; and what else is going on in our lives at the time.

Various obstacles to dialogue can interrupt or distort communication: perhaps fear of disapproval or of reprisal, or insufficient trust in the other person's goodness and sincerity, or lack of confidence in the validity of one's own experience and insights, or, in contrast, too much confidence in one's own perspective and convictions. Other obstacles might be flattery, gossip, lies and slander, twisting of words, misrepresentation and selective deployment of truth or evasion. Excessive reticence might lead one to fail to speak when this is required, while excessive boldness might tempt one to jump in too quickly to have one's say without consideration of the consequences or likely impact. Another factor is our ignorance: there is much that we do not know. To start with, God will always remain beyond our ken; we never have our understanding of God 'taped', sorted or settled. Then, we remain a mystery to ourselves, despite rare moments of insight, often granted to us by others who shock us by their observations of who we are and what we are like. As for other people, no matter how well we think we know them, they too escape our grasp; they have depths that we cannot reach. If we think of the Church, she seems to be full of surprises for us, some welcome, others quite unwelcome. If we were not open to surprise, we would be closed to grace. Among the conditions which facilitate effective communication might be noted a recognition that no one has a monopoly on the truth, a presumption that those with whom we differ are acting in good faith, caution in ascribing motives to others for their adoption of particular arguments, and a willingness to put the best possible construction on differing positions, together with acceptance that one's own viewpoint might be mistaken.

What might dialogue - between parties who disagree about truth-claims or about values - achieve? Dialogue could lead to some combination of benefits drawn from the following possibilities: agreement on substantive issues, more effective joint action and collaboration, agreement about procedures for dealing with neuralgic issues, reduced number areas of disagreement about issues or an increased number of areas of agreement. Or it might open the door to better mutual understanding and appreciation; it might resolve some misunderstandings or improve relationships between participants. Other potential gains might include a raised level of involvement in decision-making processes, a more internally cohesive community and better witness externally. Educators might prompt students to ask: can we approach others seeking to appreciate their position and passion, their experience and perspective, their pain and fear, their commitments and their way of reading threats to these commitments?

Teachers and educational leaders everywhere, if they are to be effective, should go beyond mere competence; they need honesty, humility, humanity and hope. To sustain these for the long haul, they require conviction (with regard to their fundamental principles) courage (in how they put these into practice in face of difficulties, opposition and disappointments) and compassion (for those on the receiving end of their work). The tone of voice to be adopted should be one that is confident, clear, open, humble, respectful, invitational, imaginative, constructive and collaborative. When these elements are present, features of teaching for worthwhile learning that become evident include compassion for learners, rather than a need to exercise control over them, admiring contemplation of what is being studied, instead of efficient manipulation of it, and a stance of inter-dependence with students, fellow teachers and the wider community, in place of treating either the classroom or the topic under investigation as personal possessions.

2. Communication media and faith education

More than a generation ago the cultural theorist and religious thinker Walter Ong (1912 - 2003) pointed out how changes in the media of communication used in a society alter the balance within what he called the 'sensorium', the relative attention given to seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and speaking in our engagement with the world around us. Changes in the communication media employed by people in general and by teachers and learners in particular affect not only our language but our perceptions and our thinking, our modes of reasoning and valuing. It seems timely at this point in our cultural development, when waves of digital innovation in communication technologies wash over us with increasing rapidity, for Christian educators to reflect on how our interaction with communication media might affect our understanding of the task of communicating Christian faith.

Because of my low level of expertise in this field, I will rely heavily for this part of the paper on my reading of some writers who have greatly enhanced our understanding of how communications media affect our engagement with reality. Apart from drawing upon Ong, I will also refer to the writer who first alerted me (in the 1980s) to the influence of television in framing the way we interpret the world, Neil Postman, before making use of the lenses provided by three other specialists in media and communication: Sven Birketts, Luciano Floridi and Peter Horsfield.

Although my intention is not to concentrate on the media being used – or that might be used – in Christian education, nor is it to demonstrate a desire to be up-to-date or culturally 'savvy' as to the potential of new communications technologies, I believe it is important to acknowledge, albeit only too briefly and inadequately, their bearing on any attempt to communicate or to witness to Christian faith in church or in educational settings (at any level). Wise educators should remain alert to the bearing of culture and its communication media on the outlooks and mind-sets, the dispositions and expectations, the capacities and blind-spots of teachers and students. The messages that are conveyed, the language that is used, the relationships that are fostered, the modes of presence that are established and the kinds of learning that are facilitated in education cannot help but be deeply implicated in and pervasively influenced by the broader communication context.

The rapid development of new and increasingly more sophisticated communication technologies has an impact on our understanding of knowledge (its sources, nature, structure, reliability and interconnectedness or coherence), of text and of learning. It also modifies how we think about personal identity, self-expression, social conventions, community, authority and our perception of moral norms. In doing so, the ways we read and respond to the world are shifting. Changes occur in our experience of time and space, our sense of presence – who is present to us and how; changes are also experienced in our views on of what is possible, what is plausible and what is permitted. Our awareness and appreciation of stability, of continuity, of achieving depth through long-term engagement with and commitment to others, with texts and the world around us may become interrupted and inhibited.

Religious faith is inevitably influenced by the cumulative effect of all these unforeseen consequences of technological change, along with alterations in our thinking, our habits, our imagination, desires, our priorities and the people we are in touch with. Affecting us in tandem, new technologies 'modify our reflexes and expectations' (Birketts, 2006, p.xiii). Technology changes the story-line of society in several ways: it significantly adds to the sheer number of stories to which we have access; it loosens our connection to traditional reference points for the stories we inherit; it modifies how we encounter stories, for example, beyond face-to-face encounters and listening to elders, to sources and agencies with which we do not enjoy a direct and ongoing relationship or holistic reinforcement experiences. Nearly twenty years ago an observer of cultural trends could comment: 'Children used to

grow up in a home where parents told most of the stories. Today television tells most of the stories to most of the people most of the time' (Gerbner, cited by Warren, 1992). Despite the continuing cultural dominance of television, it is likely that this judgement has been rendered out-dated, given the proliferation of new communications media now being deployed by children and young adults who live in a hypermedia environment where there is a blend of 'text, still image, moving image, and sound, all arranged through a series of controlling icons' (Purves, 1998, p.112).

Walter Ong has argued that Socrates' complaints at the end of the *Phaedrus* about writing – that it diminishes memory, lacks interaction, disseminates at random, and disembodies speakers and hearers – are similar to late twentieth-century worries about computers as well as fifteenth-century concerns about printing (Ong, 1982, 79 -81). This complaint has been well-described by John Durham Peters in his history of communication *Speaking Into the Air*: 'Writing parodies live presence; it is inhuman, lacks interiority, destroys authentic dialogue, is impersonal, and cannot acknowledge the individuality of its interlocutors; and it is promiscuous in distribution' (Peters, 1999, p.47). Not only, as Ong observes, might we apply this to computers; it has been lamented also with regard to many other technological innovations in communication.

Two major insights from Ong deserve mention here: first, his account of the 'sensorium'; second, his analysis of key characteristics of media. In *The Presence of the Word* he describes the sensorium as the complete set of our bodily senses working together as an operational complex (Ong, 1967, p.6), explaining that the way we use our senses and the relative weight we attribute to each of them has a different configuration according to the culture in which we find ourselves. 'Cultures vary greatly in their exploitation of the various senses and in the way they relate their conceptual apparatus to the various senses. … a given culture … brings [a person] to organize his sensorium by attending to some types of perception more than others, by making an issue of certain ones while relatively neglecting other ones' (Ong, 1967, pp.3, 6). This is not to deny the fact that our senses provide both opportunities for, as well as constraints on, cultural developments; the influence between culture and senses is reciprocal. Our world is simultaneously both personal, as constructed by us, and objective, given to us. 'The sensorial organization specific to any given time and culture may bring us to overspecialize in certain features of actuality and to neglect others' (Ong, 1967, p.175).

Following on from this, Ong draws attention to three characteristics of media. He shows how any particular medium used in communication addresses and activates one or more of the different physical senses of sight, sound, hearing, touch and taste, affecting social perception as well as bodily engagement. Then, he links different media with particular associated ways of managing information, including its storage, retrieval and dissemination, with attendant effects on how cultures develop and deploy systems of meaning. Finally, he shows how the use of different media frames the pattern of relationships and authority in a culture.

It is often the case that, for most of the time, we remain unaware of the ways that our use of media of communication influences our perceptions and behaviour. In this respect, I found very helpful the work of Neil Postman, an expert on communication and culture, when I came across it thirty years ago. Postman pointed out that

> Each medium … makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility. … Whether we are experiencing the world through the lens of speech or the printed word or the television camera, our media-metaphors, classify the world for us, sequence it, frame it enlarge it, reduce it, colour it, argue a case for what the world is like (Postman, 1987, p.10).

In the cultural mind-set fostered by television, Postman lamented the trivialisation that pervades our information environment. He quotes a television editor's assumptions about a news show 'that bite-sized is best, that complexity must be avoided, that nuances are dispensable, that qualifications impede the simple message, that visual stimulation is a substitute for thought, and that verbal precision is an anachronism' (pp.107-8). In addition to being concerned about the deleterious effects on education and on the political health of democracies of the cultural mind-set changes brought about by television, he noted that 'questions about the psychic, political and social effects of information are as applicable to the computer as to television' (p.166). His argument was that cognitive habits, social relations and value priorities are inevitably modified by the ideology-laden baggage that accompanies technological change.

Sven Birkerts enhances our appreciation of the nature of the changes brought about by the emergence of new communications media in two ways: first by offering a balance sheet of gains and losses; second, by drawing attention to the new communal experience made

possible through such media, a form of life he calls 'electronic tribalism' (Birketts, 2006, p.27). Birketts mentions four principal gains for individuals from electronic postmodernity:

> an increased awareness of the "big picture," a global perspective that admits the extraordinary complexity of interrelations; an expanded neural capacity, an ability to accommodate a broad range of stimuli simultaneously; a relativistic comprehension of situations that promotes the erosion of old biases and often expresses itself as tolerance; a matter-of-fact and unencumbered sort of readiness, a willingness to try new situations and arrangements (Birketts, 2006, p.27).

For educators these features deserve to be considered assets that support learning, rather than liabilities that impede it, even if they tend to erode fixed certainties and confidence in the reliability of traditions. These gains, however, for Birketts, should be weighed against some accompanying losses, among which he includes:

> a fragmented sense of time and a loss of the so-called duration experience, that depth phenomenon we associate with reverie; a reduced attention span and a general impatience with sustained inquiry; a shattered faith in institutions and in the explanatory narratives that formerly gave shape to subjective experience; a divorce from the past, from a vital sense of history as a cumulative or organic process (Birketts, 2006, p.27).

It is interesting to note a rather different inflection of Birkett's loss column when assessing the consequences of widespread use of new communications media. In her 2015 book *Reclaiming Conversation* Sherry Turkle laments the way that, in the various dimensions of their lives, people find ways around conversation, tempted by the possibilities of a text or an email in which they do not have to look, listen or reveal themselves. Her argument is that we are becoming addicted to connection over conversation, and this fact is stopping us from engaging in real debate, sharing our real opinions and reacting to our family, friends, partners and colleagues in a way that either encourages necessary conflict, or diffuses it. According to her, we are shying away from the real politics of the public square and heading for a subdued, online version of ourselves, allowing digital devices to dictate our daily life. Her thesis is that, in the bid for instant and permanent connectivity that is fuelled by new digitised communication, real presence - along with deep and engaging conversations that require time - are put in jeopardy. Such connectivity, rather than serious and deep communication, is what Birketts refers to as being enveloped in 'hive life', a form of electronic tribalism, one that is being built out of multiple components: 'telephone, fax, computer-screen networks, e-mail, interactive television' (Birketts, 2006, pp.226; 228), to which we could add texting, skype and smart-phone applications.

The specialist in the philosophy and ethics of information, Luciano Floridi, refers to four revolutions brought about by Copernicus, Darwin, Freud and Turing. Each of the first three of these revolutions displaces some aspect of our understanding of our place in the world and our own nature. As he says, with respect to the first three of these revolutions, 'we are not immobile, at the centre of [a] universe' that revolves around us, 'we are not unnaturally separate and diverse from the rest of the animal kingdom, and we are far from being Cartesian minds entirely transparent to ourselves' (Floridi, 2014, p.90). The fourth revolution, as described by Floridi, one inaugurated by Alan Turing in the 1940s, 'displaced us from our privileged and unique position in the realm of logical reasoning, information processing, and smart behaviour' (p.93). Our own creations, computers and related information and communications technologies, alerted us to our situation as 'mutually connected and embedded in an informational environment (the infosphere), which we share with other informational agents, both natural and artificial, that also process information logically and autonomously' (p.94).

Key elements in this infosphere include (among others) 'cloud computing, … smartphone apps, tablets and touch screens, GPS', as well as 'identity theft, online courses, [and] social media' … all of which have become 'environmental, anthropological, social, and interpretative forces', forces which cumulatively work together in such a way as to modify, pervasively, profoundly, and relentlessly, 'how we relate to each other … and how we interpret the world' (Floridi, p.vi). The infosphere evidently includes, for Floridi, not only the technological tools and their properties, but also the agents who use them and the interactions and relations they make possible. Our whole environment now has to be understood as one that is inescapably interactional, governed by informational processes. In a striking comment, Floridi observes that 'we grew up with cars, buildings, furniture, clothes, and all sorts of gadgets and technologies that were non-interactive, irresponsive, and incapable of communicating, learning, or memorizing' (p.48), but this is no longer the case. Increasingly and inexorably everything around us seems to be interactive and mutually responsive, so that, in terms of information, even if not in terms of emotional bonding, we are totally connected. According to Floridi, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have affected our understanding of what it is to be real; where once it was thought that to be real was to be unchangeable (therefore only God has true being); then that to be real was to be capable of being perceived by the senses; through the impact of ICTs, to be real is to be

something with which one can interact, even if that is transient and virtual, rather real in the concrete sense intended when perceivability was the yardstick (Floridi, 2014, p.53).

Christians are not immune from changes in the information and communication environment. They are inescapably influenced by what surrounds them both in what they think is plausible and how they express what is dear to them. Peter Horsfield links different interpretations and emphases within Christianity, and hence its diversity, to different responses by Christian groups to the communication possibilities made available by various media.

> Some Christian groups have been open to particular media practices but closed to others. Some have utilized similar media to others, but used them differently or ordered them in different hierarchies of value. Some have approached media from a purely utilitarian mindset, using whatever's available on the basis of its usefulness and effectiveness. Others have been selective in the media they use because of a given medium's different cultural associations. Some have seen technological forms of mediation as a priority; others have given higher priority to bodily, interpersonal forms of mediation (Horsfield, 2015, p.286).

Christian educators must face the challenge of evaluating and working out the implications for their mission of the various features of our communication environment that have been noted in this section, whichever term one finds most helpful - hypermedia, the infosphere, the hive, connectivity or informational matrix. They need to be alert to how communication media are shaping our environment in its multiple dimensions – cognitive, economic, political, social, cultural, moral, and even physical. A few comments on the bearing of such developments on education seem pertinent.

First, it must be acknowledged that 'no communication arrangement can guarantee to make accessible the truths of Christian faith' (Scharer and Hilberath, 2008, p.21). Such access, is subject to and requires both the gift of grace and the free response of the one who receives it.

Second, technology can do much but still remains in service to the underlying and enduring inner capacities or gifts of humanity, including imagination. This point is illustrated in the following brief anecdote. 'When I grew up, I could not imagine a world without Kodak. Neither could the managers of Kodak. As a result of this assumption, Kodak has become history' (Mahbubani, 2015, p.30). Even as humanity becomes increasingly dependent on technology, the technology still depends on our inner capacities and qualities, such as

sensitivity, listening, intelligence, conscience, empathy and judgement. Without these, connectivity will never lead to community or become mutual attunement.

Third, in order to move beyond mere connectivity, there is the need to nurture the willingness to engage in deeper listening. Many years ago Postman claimed that one of the benefits that education should give us is a built-in crap-detector, the ability to tell when some person or group was trying to deceive or manipulate us (Postman and Weingartner, 1971). Can we now hope that one of the benefits that education will give us is a better hearing-aid? There are signs in our culture of greater openness about and willingness to share experiences, feelings and a greater acknowledgement of our need for recognition, acceptance and affirmation.

Fourth, with pluralism, postmodernity and a widespread erosion of confidence in claims to certainty about metanarratives, perhaps education will begin to do justice to the diversity of ways of knowing, focussing not only cognitive, rational and conceptual knowledge, but also aesthetic, symbolic/gestural, embodied, kinaesthetic and spiritual knowledge.

Fifth, in acknowledging much greater access to and democratisation of knowledge – with multiple sources of information – Christian educational institutions should welcome and adjust to the ensuing distributed nature of authority. Centralisation and concentration of authority, with associated pressures toward conformity and compliance, even though marked features of the Church in recent centuries, do not fit well with the Christian mission to make mature, responsible and committed disciples.

Sixth, if in the past a strong emphasis in Christian education has been to pass on a body of content (scripture, doctrine, moral precepts), and if, in more recent times students have been encouraged to interrogate their own experience, in the light of current cultural developments in our communication environment, it is now necessary to give priority to equipping students to interpret and critique the culture, its assumptions and values, the habits it promotes, attentive to what it privileges and what it neglects, aware of how it frames our sense of identity, relationships, belonging and expectations.

3. Inculturation, mediation and communication

Integral to being human is participation in a culture. Many people inhabit several cultures at the same time, although these do not all have the same degree of purchase on their lives. As was noted in part two, the cultures one lives among affect a person's awareness and imagination, hopes and fears, expectations of others and assumptions about life. Cultural environments are permeated by messages mediated via many different modes of communication beyond immediate face-to-face contact, for example, television and the global internet, advertising and music, magazines and movies, video-games and mobile phones, along with the whole range of what Floridi has named the infosphere, each of which exerts a subtle influence on how people think and value. Christian educators must be conscious of, informed about and sensitive to the impact of culture on themselves and those they hope to address. The many types of activity that a Christian educator might be involved in, including proclamation and witness, worship and service, nurture and liberation, constantly have to be adjusted: as the surrounding culture changes, these activities are inevitably understood and expressed differently in a new mixture and set of priorities.

Some aspects of a culture will be hospitable to religious faith; some aspects will be hostile; while still other aspects will be indifferent. Christian educators need discernment – to avoid blanket acceptance or blind rejection of culture of the people with whom they are working. If Christians run away from the surrounding culture, so as not to be contaminated by it, they risk slipping into a ghetto, abdicate their responsibility to influence the world for the better and fail the people God wants them to touch; their purity becomes irrelevant to the world. On the other hand, if they throw ourselves into the world, they might soon find they have accepted too much of it on its own terms, and without realising it they could become assimilated and swallowed up by it and unable to bring to it the distinctive salt and light of faith. The challenge is to learn how to swim in a culture without drowning in it. In order to be relevant, they need to be rooted in culture and local needs. But, to be adequately Christian, they also need to be able to transcend culture. They have to be both at home, familiar with and hospitable to a culture, but also, to some degree, also a stranger, unsettled and disturbing in it. They are called to be *in* the world, to prompt it lovingly towards God, yet not *of* the world, fully accepting it as it is.

In bridging the gap between faith and a particular culture, Christian educators need to emphasize both the 'foreignness' of Christian faith – its supernatural character – and its

connection to, its continuity with, and its be-friending and enhancing of daily life – its natural aspects. They should avoid watering down the challenge and 'foreignness' of faith and the Gospel by domesticating the call to conversion of life and holiness. Yet they should also avoid causing unnecessary barriers for those on the path to faith by lacking imagination and creativity in their presentation of the Christian story. Thus, in one sense Christian educators today face the same challenge of holding in balance both closeness to and distance from the culture(s) surrounding them as the one with which all their predecessors had to deal. Yet, they also need to reflect carefully on the rapidly changing context brought about by Floridi's fourth revolution and its as-yet-unclear implications for our sense of identity, relationships, belonging, our thinking, valuing and imagining, our memory, hopes and constraints. Being immersed in a culture always entails being subject to unconscious codes that are difficult to discern, being complicit in hidden conflicts that can easily remain outside our consciousness, and being prompted to be creative with the resources available to us (see Gallagher, 2004, p.161).

The challenge entailed in connecting faith to culture is sometimes referred to as inculturation – the task of showing how the gospel relates to a particular time, place and cultural setting. This is a two-way process. Just as the gospel casts new light on each human situation, in turn that situation can bring different dimensions of the gospel into salience. Throughout history, each generation has had to read, receive and respond to the gospel in ways made possible by, but also in ways that are restricted by, the patterns of perception and behaviour associated with life in the world. The gospel always has to take root, to touch down in flesh and blood people, in very particular circumstances. Inevitably, in doing so, it changes colour, depending on what is already lighting up the lives of the people and what is darkening them

In an encounter with Christian faith, the culture will find itself challenged and be pressed to see itself in a new light. At the same time, when Christians encounter another culture, they will find their faith challenged, and they will find it necessary to re-interpret this faith and see it differently. Modifications in self-understanding are likely to be necessary on both sides as bridges are built between the heritage of Christian faith and the value systems, symbols, and cultures of learners. Incarnating the faith in a particular context will entail engagement by Christians with the language, perceptions, priorities, preoccupations and practices of the people therein. Such engagement facilitates the reception and appropriation of Christian faith

in terms understandable to the receiving culture. In turn however, all cultures need to be evangelized, brought into the light of the Cross.

The process of inculturation calls for two processes to take place in reciprocal interaction. There needs to be an intelligent 'reading' of a culture, conducted in such a way that one's reading is minimally dominated by the thought-forms of that culture (otherwise one's thinking will merely be a reflection of what is already there in the culture). This calls for a degree of standing back, of distancing, from that culture, in order to approach it freed from its presuppositions, insofar as this is possible. 'The world's outlook evaluates and understands by equating the person with possessions, positions, achievements, actions, linguistic or religious or cultural groups' (Mattam, 2003, p.229). There also needs to be an immersion into the outlook of Jesus. Integral to this challenge of holding together both processes – interpreting the culture and induction into a Christian perspective – there needs to a recognition that both worlds, that of our contemporary culture and the world of Jesus, do not appear before us transparently, nakedly, obviously or simply in some unfiltered manner; they come to us via multiple mediations. The complex role of communication technologies in mediating to us our culture has already been apparent in part two of this paper. The person and teaching of Jesus is accessible to us also only via multiple mediations: through scripture, preaching, sacramental practice, ecclesial life, the witness of countless people of God, prayer, service and conscience - all the elements that comprise a living tradition.

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I have been reflecting on the centrality of communication in our lives and the influence of new media of communication in our culture. Let me make a more explicit connection now with my understanding of education. Education is about the capacities of human nature: energy, emotions, intelligence, memory, will, conscience, imagination and wonder – and how these are developed, oriented, ordered and integrated. Christian education does all this in the light of Christ. Education can be an encounter and a journey in which many gifts and capacities are made possible. The following list, while long, remains incomplete. Education can enable people to think clearly, to analyse ideas, to weigh up the soundness and significance of claims, to express oneself convincingly, to interpret evidence and to take into account different points of view. Through their example and with their guidance, teachers can help students learn how to listen sensitively, to read intelligently, to judge carefully, to appreciate the insights, gifts and works of others and to relate compassionately and

cooperatively. To this treasury of gifts one might add further possibilities: learning to know oneself, to give oneself to commitments and to others, to love wisely and to develop confidence and competence in ongoing learning, together with the discipline and reinforced desire to find truth, beauty and goodness and the capacities to build a good life.

My own experience as a teacher, of children, young people and adults, is that students surprise us by their singularity. They learn something different from what we teach them. They break through our expectations (positive and negative). We experience them as a foreign country. They make demands on us that force us to be more attentive to their otherness, rather than taking them for granted. Although we want them to be like us in some aspect of knowledge or skill, they cannot be a copy; they are – like us – originals. Our courses are intended for the general student, but we face real individuals. The material is new for them; through them, it becomes new for us. Their worlds are (at least slightly) changed in their encounter with us; our world is also changed when we respond to who they are. This is a view of the relationship between teachers and students that would have been recognized by St. Augustine centuries ago. In his manual for catechists, he wrote: 'so potent is the feeling of sympathy, that when they are moved as we speak and we as they learn, we abide each with the other; and thus they, as it were, speak in us what they hear, while we, in a manner, learn in them what we teach' (Augustine, 1912, p.31). It is a view that is been echoed and expressed creatively a generation ago by Parker Palmer:

> The teacher who knows the subject well, must introduce it to students in the way one would introduce a friend. The students must know why the teacher values the subject, how the subject has transformed the teacher's life. By the same token, the teacher must value the students as potential friends, be vulnerable to the ways students may transform the teacher's relationship with the subject as well as be transformed. If I am invited into a valued friendship between two people, I will not enter in unless I feel that I am valued as well (Parker Palmer, 1993, p.104).

The qualities that education both depends upon in its teachers and seeks to develop in students are illustrated by two comments that bring out, respectively, the impact of personal communication and the need for a careful and intelligent reading of culture. The first comment comes from a young schoolteacher: 'I remember my English teacher because … he inspired me to be better, to take risks, to ask awkward questions and to feel as if I mattered' (Nicholson-Ward, 2015, p.9). The second comment is made by a professor who is an experienced teacher-educator: 'The authority of professors as scholars in their disciplines lies in their mastery of the discipline's discourse, but their authority as teachers lies in their skill

at the boundaries between the disciplines and the many worlds from which their students come' (Kenneth Bruffee, quoted by Esterline, 2005, pp.104-5). The former emphasises the positive influence that effective personal communication by a teacher can exert on students; the latter stresses the need for teachers to build bridges between students and the various cultures that surround them. That bridging role – between individuals and culture - has always been central to education; as a priority today, it must now include a confident engagement with and a critical interrogation of the influence of new media of communication. Without this, it is only too likely that students will find themselves kidnapped, rather than liberated, by their culture. Without the qualities that are integral to effective personal communication, it is quite possible that differences between people will lead to unnecessary conflict between them and that the capacity for learning of students will be impaired.

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