Some Aspects Specific to Communication and Religious Image in Christianity

Mirela Arsith[1], Daniela Aurelia Tanase Popa[2]

Abstract: The hypothesis from which we start is that religious communication is prescriptive. Religion is a universal relationship, which is a conscious and free relationship of the human being with the divinity. Both religion and religious communication have an important role in preserving the social order "the possibility of predisposing people to exercise restraint and control" (Wilson, 2000, pp. 84-85) as well as the development of the personal experience of the sacred. For Mircea Eliade, the becoming and the growth of the existence into human being means being religious (Eliade, 1981, p. VIII). Religious communication can be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective, which values the religious symbols, rituals and attitudes. Prayers, rituals, rites, religious ceremonies are manifestations of communication with divinity. In the process of religious communication, there are coordinated interactions such as divinity, faithfulness, religious institutions, world, transcendental, texts, images and religious symbols.

Keywords: religion; communication; divinity; religious image; religious symbol; religious rite

1. Introduction

The supernatural designates what transcends nature; it is the set of phenomena that are above or in contradiction to the forces and laws of nature, being attributed to some miraculous forces. A ritual not only repeats the previous ritual but continues it, forming a single and unique time. "*The sufferings of Christ, His death and His resurrection are not only commemorated during the Great Week's service, but they actually happen, right then under the eyes of the believers. And a true Christian must feel contemporary with those trans-historic events, because, repeating, the*

[1] Associate Professor, PhD, "Danubius" University of Galati, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Boulevard, 800654 Galati, Romania, Tel.: +40.372.361.102, fax: +40.372.361.290, Corresponding author: arsith.mirela@univ-danubius.ro.

[2] Senior Lecturer, PhD, "Danubius" University of Galati, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Boulevard, 800654 Galati, Romania, Tel.: +40.372.361.102, fax: +40.372.361.290, E-mail: daniela.popa@univ-danubius.ro.

theophany's time becomes present." (Eliade, 1992, p. 359). Ideas of periodicity and repetition occupy an important place in both mythology and religion.

There are, however, numerous celebrations that express the tendency to suppress the already leached sacrilegious time and to establish a "new time." "*... periodicity means, above all, the infinite use of a mythical time restored to present. All rituals have the property of happening now, at this moment*" (Eliade, 1992, p. 360). The sacred time reveals the absolute, supernatural, superhuman, supra-historical. "In religion, as in magic, periodicity means, above all, the infinite use of a mythical time, restored to present. All rituals have the property of happening now, at this moment" (Eliade, 1992, p. 359). Sacred time is not just a periodic resurrection of profane duration.

A constitutive process in the self-design of man outside and inside the patterns of thought and action of communities is communication. By communicating, the individual manifests his desire and ability to adopt the attitude of the group to which he belongs.

Serge Moscovici argues that "*in order to understand the magical or religious beliefs, it is good to examine the representations shared by the community*" (Moscovici, 1998, p. 175). By communicating, a content is transmitted and a relationship is established and maintained. The relationship encompasses the content and, by doing so, it becomes a meta-communication. "The ability to Meta-communicate in a satisfactory manner is not only a *sine qua non* of a good communication; it also has very close links with the vast problem of self-consciousness and the other" (Watzlawick, Helmick, & Jackson, 1972, p. 52)

2. Religious Communication - Another Hypostasis of Communication

Any communication process is *symmetrical* or *complementary*, if it is based, respectively, on *equality* or *difference*. (Pârvu, 2000, p. 71) In communicative behavior one can distinguish symmetrical systems in which partners adopt a "mirror-based" behavior based on equality (e.g. communication between believers) and complementary systems centered on difference (e.g. communication between the believer and the divinity).

The overall purpose of communicating is the expression of an identity. By communicating, we affirm our being and we position ourselves in relation to the *other* (who may be another man or the divinity of itself). The issue of positioning

actors in a communication is general, global, and permanent. Communication also implies certain intentionality. "*Nothing in a communication situation can be understood unless we understand the purpose in which social actors do or say something*" (Mucchielli, 2002, p. 168). Intention - through the communication it includes - is in fact a commitment in a situation.

When we communicate with divinity, we establish a certain ratio, a certain relationship that in turn acquires a certain "quality". Communication cannot exist without the quality of the relationship. The relational "techniques" need to be adapted to the situation and must be consistent with what can be done in the given situation (Mucchielli, 20002, p. 127). These procedures are related to the implicit, the nonverbal, paralanguage. Sacralizing language is the way of communicating with divinity by permanently rebuilding the code of signs, that God associated with the world at the time of creation itself. In this process a determinant role has human creation, which can be revealed as a sign of divine creation, as resigning the relationship between the human being and God.

A widespread form of communication with God is *prayer*. In a specific language, the believer thanks God, asks for his support and help, expresses his faith and faith in the love, benevolence and divine power of doing good and miracles. For J. Böhme, the man is in the image of God by expressing it by participating in his verb: "*Man has received the power of the invisible Verb of God to re-express, so as to express in his turn the hidden Verb of divine science in distinct forms, in the way of temporal creatures*" (apud Wunenburger, 2004, p. 155). This statement is resumed at the beginning of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*: the Son "*being the blaze of glory and the image of His being, and keeping all the word of his power*" (p. 1359).

Not just as a pre-existing Logos, but as an incarnate Verb, the Verb was manifested when it became man, becoming like man, and making man like him, so that through his likeness to the Son, the man might become dear to the Father. (*apud* Besançon, 1996, p. 99).

3. Religious Communication through Images

With the image, we move on to a communication whose efficacy is multiplied, as it generally reaches an extremely large number of recipients, but which is "much less interactive because it is often exercised in a unique sense: the roles the transmitter and receiver do not change between them" (Baylon & Mignot, 2000, p. 171).

For Jean-Paul Sartre, the image is conscious of something, and "image consciousness implies our awareness of its significance" (Sartre, 1997, p. 87). The image serves as a sign, it has a meaning, it is in a relationship with something other than itself; is a substitute. It has intellectual content, it indicates a logical reality, as any image needs to be understood.

Plato states that it is not possible for the evil to perish, for there must always be something against the good, and it "cannot stand with the gods, so it needs to pass through the mortal nature and its place. That is why we must try to get out of here towards there as soon as possible. Fleeing means becoming as much as possible to be more like divinity, as resemblance means becoming just and holy with wisdom" (Plato, 1989, p. 226). This fragment shows that for the ancient Greeks, the purpose of human life was resemblance (homoiosis) with God.

Thus, Christianity is delimited by Platonism, for which any image remains an external artifact but also Judaism, in the vision of which no visible image participates in the divine nature. Thus, "*there is at least one Image, that of the visible God in the person of the Son, which has an ontological fullness equal to that of its principle*" (Wunenburger, 2004, p. 143), by which it also ensures a new theophanic function of the full manifestation of the Absolute Being".

Mircea Eliade says the images manage to tell their subjects more than words can do. Any description, no matter how skillful, will leave behind a rest, something untold, beyond the possibilities of verbal language; something, however, accessible by examining the image (Arsith, 2010, p.54). For this reason, translating them into words means a diminution of their meanings: "... *the power and purpose of the Images consists in the fact that it shows everything that remains refractory to the concept.*" (Eliade, 1996, p. 25)

The divine citadels, the angels who can be identified in the visionary religious texts "are, in fact, indirectly imaginable manifestations of the divine Absolute" (Wunenburger, 2004, p. 124). St. Toma affirms that each creature, being simultaneously similar in part and in part different, does not relate to God but

analogically. Every finite being has a resemblance to its creator, but no finite representation allows us to reach God's complete knowledge of the first and eternal cause (apud Wunenburger, 2004, p. 152).

Paul, in the *Epistle to Colossians*, 1, 15, claimed that Jesus Christ "*is the image of God, the unseen, the firstborn before all beings*" (Bible, 1999, p. 1337). And in Corinthians II, 3, 18, he said, *"And all of us, looking as in a mirror, with the unveiled face, the glory of the Lord, make us in the same way from glory in glory as from the Spirit of the Lord."*

According to Irineus, "*The image of God is the Son according to whose likeness man was made. This is why the Son appeared at the end of time, to show that his image resembles him."* Therefore, God the Son is both a collaborator and a model.

Imago Dei involves moral and rational factors that link the human being to the sphere of the spirit, which helps him to formulate general principles, gives him the discursive capacity, the sense of moral duty, the consciousness of history, and the propensity for social and civilization concerns.

St. Grigorie of Nyssa states that man's perfection consists in the fact that he was created in the likeness and resemblance of God (Lossky, 1998, p. 101). The man created in the image of God is the nature understood as a whole.

According to Origen, if the *Logos* is the *Face* that makes the known *Parent Archetype*, all the problems concerning divine manifestation, "cosmic" in the nature created by the *Word*, or "historical" in the revelation given to a people chosen to receive the Word of God, will belong to "the theology of the face". Man *is not fitting* to God's image, which is a privilege only of the Son, but only *in his own* image or "according to the image of the image." The Augustinian doctrine of the image is in the prolongation of origenism, because it places the image of God not in the human body, but in its soul (*apud* Besançon, 1996, p. 111).

The soul is image by its ability to know God. Even under the sin, the image cannot be erased: "*The image may be so worn out that it almost ceases to appear, it can be dark and disfigured, it can be clear and beautiful, it does not cease to exist*" (De Trinity) *apud* Besançon, 1996, p. 112). Incapable of touching God, the human being must examine it in his works, that is, in the body world, of which man belongs, then in the soul, which is his most clear image.

If man is "in the image of" the Logos, everything about the destination of the human being - gift, sin, redemption through the *Word become man* – he will have

to relate to the same extent to the theology of the face (Lossky, 1998, p. 118). The face is the silent language; he exists for the other and it is for God. The creation of man "in the image" of God gives human beings a domination over animals, just as God exercises over all creatures.

The cult of the images was officially banned by Emperor Constantine V in 726. An icon, he said, must be of the same nature as the represented one, being necessarily *consubstantial*, otherwise it is not a real icon. "If an image should be this way, no icon is possible. No image made by the human hand can be consubstantial to God, nor to any other living being" (*apud* Besançon, 1996, p. 136). The cult of icons was also anathematized by the iconoclast synod of Constantinople in 754, the theological argument being the idolatry revealed by the glorification of the icons. Beyond political and social reasons, the iconoclastic attitude does not resist. Iconoclasts did not take into account, on the one hand, the symbolic function of sacred images, and on the other hand, the iconophiles used the cult of icons to increase the prestige and wealth of ecclesiastical institutions.

Iconophile theology was developed by Ioan Damaschin and Theodor Studitul. The most important moment in defining the Christological foundation of the image was the Quinisext Synod at the end of the seventeenth century, with its Canon 82, in which the icon is defined: "*On some paintings (graphais) there is the lamb that the Later He shows it with his finger; this lamb was put there as a model of the gift, prefiguring - through the intercession of the Law - the true Lamb, Christ God. Of course, we honor the typos and the shadows as symbols and imaginations of the Church [...], that this fulfillment is all manifest through paintings, so that instead of the old lamb to be represented - according to his human nature (anthropinon charactera) - Who raised the sin of the world, Christ*" (apud Uspensky, 1994, p. 57). The concrete humanity of Christ the Savior legitimizes sacred images and their veneration. Canon 82 proves its importance in the fact that, for the first time, the Church clearly defines the inextricable relationship between the theology of the icon and the Christology. Always, the defenders of the icon will use this argument from here.

Following the command of the Decalogue "Do not Make a Graven Face ..." Christians of the first two centuries have not made images. Starting with the third century, in the Eastern Empire, the prohibition comes to be ignored when Scripture figures and scenes appear in the cemeteries or in the places where the believers come together. Christian religious iconography begins to form. In the 4th and 5th centuries, the images multiply and accentuate their appreciation. People pouted in

front of icons, kissed and wore them in processions. Also during this period, the critique and defense of icons is configured. "According to some, the icon should not have been worshiped at all; others admit the image of Christ, but not those of the Virgin and of the saints; Finally, others affirmed that Christ may be represented before the Resurrection, but that after that He can no longer be presented" (Uspensky, 1994, pp. 78-79).

In the hierarchy of the heavenly hierarchy, Saint Dionysius the Areopagite supports the possibility of knowing the divine things by means of the sensible symbols. These can be either ways of using holy faces, or shapes of non-alien forms, for what is totally dissimilar and incomprehensible (Areopagitul, 1996, p. 17). "*Joining the intuition of a dual, divine and human nature in Christ, these artistic and theological trends sought to establish in the visible world spaces for the identification and presentation of the meta-empiric, which lead to a sort of unprecedented apotheosis of the image*" (Wunenburger, 2004, p. 204).

Ioan Damaschin, in the three treaties against iconoclasm, gives to the term image an explicit definition: "*The icon is a resemblance, a pattern, a replica of someone who shows in it the person who is depicted in the icon.*" In general, however, the icon does not resemble the original, that is, with the represented one. "*Another is the icon and something else is the original, and there is generally a difference between them, because it is not the other, and the other is not the one.*" (*Apud* Ionica, 2000, p. 37). The definition is based on ideas of partial resemblance, and consequently, the lack of identity between representation and represented, one cannot be the other. Thus, the icon (image) of man, though it impresses the figure of his body, does not possess his psychic faculties, he does not live.

For Ioan Damaschin, the image is hierarchized by the degree of participation in the prototype, from quasi-identity between the Father and the Son, to the identity of principle. Damaschin distinguishes between different ways in which an icon can be understood and considered. This finding draws in part from the contemporary way of understanding things, from the possibility of multiple reading, from different perspectives, of the same "text", whether it is written or portrayed as an image. The image has a mediating role, it unites the soul of man with the transcendent realm (Arsith, 2010, p. 124).

In Damaschin's view, the icon is an entire universe of symbols. "*Therefore, images were likely to perfect and deepen the religious instruction of those who did not know how to read*. (Icons have indeed had this role in all rural areas of Eastern

Europe)" (Eliade, 1991, p. 64). Ion Damaschin fervently defended the art of the holy image, which is meant to complete the action of incarnation and to actively participate in the regeneration of man through a new image. "*Because the icon becomes so, the path of beauty through which man can abolish the distance separating himself from the divinity*" (Wunenburger, 2004, p. 203). Thus, a viewing theology is configured, it emphasizes the overcoming of the representation. In a sense, the icon represents the most significant symbolic object in the context of the Christian liturgical universe. In this context, the icon is a symbol that fulfills a defining mediating function between sensible and intelligible.

Limited to an area of civilization and a historical age, the icon is also limited in its vocabulary and grammar. The means of the icon (the colors with their symbolic influence, the geometry that organizes the image, etc.) do not guarantee by anything the inevitable attainment of the goal (Besançon, 1996, p. 152). Ascetic spiritualization, exalted forehead, slim and tight mouth, scaly cheeks, careful and serious eye should not be taken as an automatic equivalent of deification. They are symbolic refunds whose effectiveness does not depend on the justice and sublime theological underlying.

According to Father Stăniloae, a personalized justification of the necessity of the icon can be established as a possibility of preserving a direct "face-to-face" relationship between man and God. Thus, the icon is imposed, within the cult, as the medium of dialogue between man and God; "*The rejection of the icon is proper to those who generally reject any communication of Christ, from the invisible background with us, through some kind of powe*r" (Stăniloae, 1986, p. 55). The face and the word are means of communication between people. Man realizes himself by communicating with others. "*The man is the interpersonal being, we, Christians, say that he is the tri-personal being, in the image of the Holy Trinity, as, forever, two persons speaking consider a third person or a multiplier of himself*" (Stăniloae, 1986, p. 56). The face is the inevitable projection of the person to the others. It's up to him, because he is keeping the others. "*The Son of God, taking the human face, has maximized the anchoring to divine infinity and its will to communicate to other people this experience of humanity assumed by Him in the infinity of life and love of God*" (Stăniloae, 1986, p. 59). The divine image, as the source of all the human "faces", and therefore of the image assumed by Christ, is the origin of any expressiveness and interpersonal communication.

4. Communication through Religious Symbols

The relationship of signification takes place as follows: facts are given their meaning by a guarded examination of images, constituted in exemplary models. Imagination imitates them, reproduces them, repeats them indefinitely. Thus, symbols, images and myths reveal the deepest aspects of reality, inaccessible to other means of knowledge: "*the spirit resorts to images to sense the ultimate reality of things*" (Eliade, 1994, p. 19). Besides this autonomy, the images also have their own identity, which distinguishes them from one another and generates that "beam of meanings", ensuring their persistence for centuries or millennia.

The symbol addresses both thought and feeling, and when its distinctive nature acquires a sensory form, it stimulates both sensation and intuition. The symbol is always open. What can be called the *symbolic thought* makes possible the free flow of the human being through all levels of reality. The symbol identifies, assimilates, unifies different levels, and apparently irreducible realities. Moreover, the religious experience allows the transformation of man himself into the symbol.

The triangular connection significant - sense - referent is, within the symbol itself, a consequence of the triangle sign - man - world, or culture - consciousness - nature, or revelation - soul - creation that structures the field of human existence (Florea, 1999, p.12). Christian theology develops a symbol of worship and an artistic tradition based on the consecration of the sensitive and visible figures of God's Image. If for Christ His human nature indicates the full assumption by God Himself, in His person, in the world, in man and in history, in the icon, its visible, sensitive dimension indicates the value of matter in analogy to the represented prototype (Florea, 1999, p. 20).

The essential function of the symbol is the *unification* of the various zones of the real, which is made in the sense that the symbolic object embodies the transcendent reality, *aiming* at the annulment of its concrete limits. "At the limit, an object that becomes a symbol tends to coincide with *Everything*" (Eliade, 1992, p. 412).

In the *Psychological Types* volume, CG Jung states that "*the symbol always assumes that the chosen expression is the best name or formula for a relatively unknown state, but recognized as existence or as necessary*" (Jung, 1997, p. 501). The symbol necessarily comes from what is more differentiated and more complex in the spiritual atmosphere of its time. "*The effect of the symbol is universal only when it expresses in such a supreme manner such content. This is the powerful and yet liberating effect of a living social symbol*" (Jung, 1997, p. 505).

5. Conclusions

The religious man believes in the sacred origin of the world and of life. In the sacred space, man discovers the existence of an absolute reality that transcends his world, but manifests itself in it and, by doing so, makes it real. "*Renewing the sacred history, imitating the divine behavior, the religious man settles and remains close to the gods, that is, in the significance of the real.*" (Eliade, 1992, p. 48) The sacred feature of language is the way of communication with divinity.

Most of those who deny religion behave, however, as religious beings, even if they are not aware of it. The myths of modern man exist, albeit in a camouflaged form. "*The cinema, this living plant, resumes and uses mythical motives: the struggle between the Hero and the Monster, battles and initiatory attempts, figures and exemplary images*" (Eliade, *The Nostalgia de origins*, 1994). Even behaviors that are declared to be secular and even antireligious are, according to Mircea Eliade, camouflaged religious behaviors, expressing nostalgia for lost paradise. *"The man must believe in something, in a "reality" - no matter which - of a higher essence, the only one able to give meaning to the world and the human condition*" (Boia, 2000, p. 30).

Using the emitic hexadecimal model created by the logician Petru Ioan (1995, p. 79-80), we propose a hexadicum of religious communication, by either word or image:
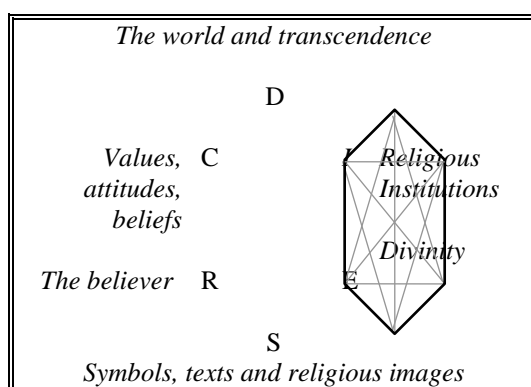
Figure 1. The Hexad of religious communication

Religious communication takes place both by word and by image. Mircea Eliade's conviction is that no matter how he resists, the modern man cannot escape transcendence.

6. Bibliography

Areopagitul, D. (1996). *Opere complete*, Dumitru Staniloae (trad.)/*Complete Works*. Bucharest: "Paideia" Publishing House.

Arsith, M. (2010). *Imagologia în contextual comunicării/Imagology in Context of Communication*. Bucharest-Galati: Editura Universitara Danubius & Prouniversitaria.

Baylon, C. & Mignot, X. (2000). *Comunicarea/Communication*. Ioana Ocneanu & Ana Zăstroiu (trad.). Ioana Ocneanu & Ana Zăstroiu (trad.). Iasi: Ed. "Al. I. Cuza".

Besançon, A. (1996). *Imaginea interzisă. Istoria intelectuală a iconoclasmului de la Platon la Kandinsky /The Forbidden Image. The intellectual history of the iconoclasm from Plato to Kandinsky, Mona Antohi (trad.).* Bucharest: Humanitas.

***(1999). *The Bible or Holy Scripture* Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române.

Boia, L. (2000). *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului. Tatiana Mochi (trad.)/For a history of the imaginary.* Tatiana Mochi (trad.). Bucharest: Humanitas.

Bryan, W. (2000). *Religia din perspectivă sociologică/Religion from a Sociological Perspective*. Iasi: Ed. Trei.

Mucchielli, A. (2005). *Arta de a comunica. Metode, forme şi psihologia situaţiilor de comunicare.* Giuliano Sfichi, Gina Puică şi *Marius Roman (trad.)/The art of communicating. Methods, forms and psychology of communication situations.* Giuliano Sfichi, Gina Puică and Marius Roman (trad.). Iasi: Polirom.

Cabin, P. & Dortier, J.-F. (coord.). *Comunicarea. Perspective actuale*. Luminiţa Roşca şi Romina Surugiu (trad.)/Communication. Current perspectives. Luminiţa Roşca and Romina Surugiu (trad.). Iasi: Polirom, pp. 125-135.

Eliade, M. (1992). *Tratat de istoria religiilor/Treaty on the history of religions.* Mariana Noica (trad.). Bucharest: Humanitas.

Eliade, M. (1994). *Imagini si simboluri/Images and symbols.* Beldescu Alexandra (trad.). Bucharest: Humanitas.

Eliade, M. (1994). *Nostalgia originilor/Nostalgia of origins.* Cezar Baltag (trad.). Bucharest: Humanitas.

Ioan, P. (1995). *Educaţie şi creaţie în perspectiva unei logici "situaţionale"/Education and creation in the perspective of a "situational" logic*. Bucharest: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.

Ionica, L. (2000). *Imaginea vizuala. Aspecte teoretice/The visual image. Theoretical aspects.* Timisoara: Marineasa.

Lossky, V. (1998). *După chipul şi asemănarea lui Dumnezeu. By the likeness and resemblence of God. Anca* Manolache (trad.). Bucharest: Humanitas.

Moscovici, S. (1998). Altruismele solidarităţilor /The altruisms of solidarity. In Serge Moscovici (coord.). *Psihologia socială a relaţiilor cu celălalt/The social psychology of relations with the other.* Cristina Mosu / trad.). Iasi: Polirom, pp. 171-188.

Picard, D. (2010). Ritualurile interacţiunii/The rituals of Interaction. In Cabin, P. & Dortier, J.-F. (coord.) *Comunicarea. Perspective actuale*/*Communication. Current perspectives.* Luminiţa Roşca & Romina Surugiu (trad.). Iasi: Polirom, pp. 125-135.

Sartre, J.-P. (1997). *Imaginaţia*/*Imagination.* Narcisa Şerbănescu (trad.). Oradea: Aion.

Platon (1989). *Opere VI/Works VI.* S. Vieru; M. Ciucă; C. Noica; E. Popescu (trad.). Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.

Stăniloae, D. (1986). *Spiritualitate şi comuniune în Liturghia ortodoxă/Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy.* Craiova.

Uspensky, L. (1994). *Teologia icoanei în Biserica Ortodoxă /Theology of the icon in the Orthodox Church.* Teodor Baconsky (trad.). Bucharest: Anastasia.

Watzlawick, P., Helmick, J. B., & Jackson, D.D. (1972). *Une logique de la communication /Some logic from communication.* Paris: Editions du Seuil.

Wunenburger, J.J. (2004). *Filosofia imaginilor/The Philosophy of Images.* Bucharest: Polirom.

Online Sources:

http://www.scribd.com/doc/27629072/Simbolul-Si-Icoana-Florin-Florea © 1999

146