Towards a Communicative Theology

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Abstract:

The following article is made up of two parts. In the first part Teresa Peter works on the comparison between the Indian approach of "Cross-Cultural Theology as Encounter", as developed by Francis D'Sa, using the approach of the "Communicative Theology". The second part by Matthias Scharer gives an introduction to the main elements of the "Communicative Theology". Communicative-theological processes are found at the interface of theological research on the one hand and of the practice of faith and religion on the other hand. This practice provokes a theological reflection again in return and this reflection is nourished by the actual practices and experiences. In the field of this interplay of theological reflection and communicative practice of faith and religion the perspective of a hermeneutics of difference can be considered as a productive challenge for an intercultural and interreligious dialogue, which gives special theological attention also to conflictive encounter-experiences.

Keywords:

Communicative-theology, practical theology, conflict-resolution, cross-cultural theology, encounter, transformation, *communicatio communion.*

The following article on Communicative Theology is made up of two parts, one written by Matthias Scharer, the other by Teresa Peter. In the first part Teresa Peter works on the comparison between the Indian approach of "Cross-Cultural Theology as Encounter", as it has been developed by Francis D'Sa, and the approach of the "Communicative Theology". The second part by Matthias Scharer gives an introduction to the main elements of the "Communicative Theology".

I. IN COMMUNICATION WITH A THEOLOGY AS CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTER (by Teresa Peter)

In the course of my studies of theology I got the chance to spend one year and a half in India. Most of that time I spent in Pune at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, where I came to know several Indian theology and philosophy professors and Indian theologians-to-be. After some time I started wondering if an inter-religious dialogue, about which I heard so much there in India, would perhaps not only be needed between different religions, but maybe a similar dialogical process would be helpful between Austrian and Indian theologians as well – that means some sort of an intra-religious and cross-cultural dialogue. But how can such a dialogue be possible and fruitful? In India as well as in Austria I came to know a theological approach, which focuses on the phenomena of encounter, communication, dialogue and relatedness.

In India Dr. Francis D'Sa, former professor of JDV, has developed a theological approach called "Cross-Cultural Theology as Encounter". Knowing the difficulties of such an enterprise he writes: "The process of theologizing cross-culturally is neither simple nor straight-forward. It involves a thorough re-vision of our presuppositions ... about being in the world and understanding of the world, about religion and our relation with Reality" (Francis D'Sa, Unpublished Script, Pune 2001, 78).

In Innsbruck, under quite different conditions and circumstances Prof. Matthias Scharer has been working – in cooperation with the systematic theologians Prof. Bernd Jochen Hilberath of Tübingen and Prof. Bradford Hinze of Milwaukee – on a "Communicative Theology" or in other words – as I personally prefer it – on the awareness of theologizing communicatively, on a theology which is done communicatively.

I am trying now to start a conversation between the Cross-Cultural Theology and the Communicative Theologies. Is there more in common than just a few expressions? And how are we able to deal with those ideas, which we do not share?

For this comparison the leading questions are the following:

§ Who are they, referring to the Cross-Cultural Theology? Who are we, referring to the Communicative Theology?

§ Can we encounter each other, communicate with each other? Can a Theology as Cross-cultural encounter and a Communicative Theology encounter each other, communicate with each other, meet and understand each other, learn form each other, complement each other and deal with the differences, which appear?

§ How can we encounter each other, communicate with each other? What is the basis of our encountering and communicating? How can this encounter, this communication, take place in order to do justice to one's own claims and postulates?

§ What changes, what is being transformed? What becomes clearer, deeper in our own approach by meeting the other, by being confronted with questions, doubts and unfamiliar convictions of the other?

I am trying to enter into a process of theologizing cross-culturally, theologizing communicatively by reflecting on these two theological approaches and by sharing my reflections with you, the reader. Of course, this short comparison can only be a first step in this direction of theologizing in the described manner, particularly because the responses of the *opponents* are missing due to this form of communication.

1. Who Are We? Who Are They?

"They" here refer to those persons, who are working cross-culturally. According to Francis D'Sa it is necessary for a cross-cultural enterprise "... to understand others as they understand themselves and as they want to be understood in order that they may understand us as we understand ourselves and as we want to be understood" (Francis D'Sa, Unpublished Script, Pune 2001, 2). For such an understanding it is – as a first step – essential to become aware of one's own presuppositions. Let me therefore

have a look at the conditions under which these two theological approaches originated, in order to deepen the awareness of the horizon of understanding, of the mythos – as D'Sa would say – of ourselves and of the other.

The Cross-Cultural Theology is situated in India, in a multi-cultural and multi-religious context with all its advantages and difficulties, tensions, conflicts and enrichments, where Christians are a minority and where the fact of being surrounded by other traditions and other faiths cannot be overlooked. Having this in mind, Cross-Cultural Theology is "… the search for a meeting-point in which each tradition can find through interaction with other traditions its centripetal identity, on the one hand, and its centrifugal identity, on the other. In other words, the search is for a common meeting-point where a tradition not only does not lose its identity but on the contrary is enabled to discover it more fully. The aim of the enterprise is to work for freedom, justice and harmony with all traditions. Freedom, justice and harmony constitute peace which is the goal of such theology." (Francis D'Sa, Unpublished Script, Pune 2001, 3/4).

On the other hand Communicative Theology was born so to say in Austria or perhaps between Austria and Germany. One of the main aspects, which influenced the development of this approach was the growing awareness of a deep gap, an "ugly ditch" between academic, reflected theology on the one hand and life-experience on the other. In this line theology looks abstract, useless for practical questions and existential experiences and incapable to be in contact with ordinary people. Communicative Theology tries to work on this dilemma without losing sight neither of the academic theology nor of the actual human experiences and questions.

2. Can They Encounter Each Other? Can They Communicate?

Can a Theology as Cross-Cultural Encounter and as Communicative Theology encounter each other? Can they

communicate with each other? In order to approach this question I will have a look at some of the main terms, which are used by the Cross-Cultural and by the Communicative Theology and at the way, in which these terms are used.

For Cross-Cultural Theology "understanding" is one of the basic terms and phenomena, which have to be reflected. Understanding cannot be equated with knowing or information. Information can just serve as pre-understanding and even a face-to-face get-together or a discussion (which exclusively stays on the level of agreeing and disagreeing) cannot reach, what is meant by "understanding" or "meeting." Francis D'sa writes: "It is fundamental to distinguish information from understanding. In today's world understanding is equated with collecting information and mastering skills of procedure. Real understanding is ontological, that is, it is at the level of be-ing. Our understanding is not to be separated from be-ing. Understanding is more than an act of the intellect; it is the act of one's whole being. To understand is to respond to the dis-closure of reality." (Francis D'Sa, Unpublished Script, Pune 2001, 12). Therefore dialogue is considered to be a way of being, and not exclusively an intellectual affair.

The background of D'Sa's understanding of understanding is the distinction between two different models of approaching the world: the so called "Seeing-Model" and the "Speaking-Model". In the "Speaking-Model", which is rejected by Cross-Cultural Theology in case, it is taken as a model for understanding and not only for one aspect of knowing, a subject studies an object, the other, who is not connected in any way to the studying subject. Two consequences follow from this model: The first one is an objectification of the other, which means that the subjectivity of the other is overseen and as a consequence the subjective perspective of the other is not taken seriously in the theological processes. The second one is the subjectification of the truth of the other, which means to perceive just those aspects of the other, which can be implemented in one's own world-view or to turn the unfamiliar other in such a way, that he/she and his/her convictions

are no longer unfamiliar and disturbing. For D'Sa it is the "Seeing-Model", which is relevant. In this model the I as well as the other are considered subjects, who are situated within one world, within a common space. This common space is the experience of "being-in-the-world" and the I cannot turn the other into an object, but can just focus on the other always in awareness of being within a common space. Following this approach, understanding cannot be reduced to one perspective. Understanding, meeting and also discourse and dialogue imply more than one perspective. As understanding at the level of being leads to change and transformation, it also implies open-endedness.

Some of these points look quite familiar and interesting to the Communicative Theology. So the distinction between communication and information – and the sensitisation for the consequences in case this distinction is neglected – is an important point in Communicative Theology as well. Considering the "Speaking"- and "Seeing"-model there can also be discovered some common elements, even when the differences are not denied. In Communicative Theology we speak of an involvement of the whole person with all dimensions of life into the process of theologizing, which means besides other dimensions also the subjectivity of each person. Therefore we are working in Innsbruck on a research-methodology, which does justice to this point of taking the subjectivity of the other seriously.

3. How Is Encounter, Communication Possible?

How can we "encounter" each other, "communicate" with each other? Perhaps the most striking aspect of these two theological approaches is the attention, which is given to the *process of theologizing*. It is not only the outcome of a theological process which counts, but it is also the way it is done. And the outcome itself is different depending on the way in which it is done. Cross-Cultural as well as Communicative Theology are special ways of theologizing and so they state, that the theological work has to be done cross-culturally or communicatively in our days. According

to these ways of theologizing new insights, new questions and doubts arise due to the cross-cultural or the communicative perspective and the outcome cannot be predicted. This process remains open-ended, can never be definitely closed, as new situations of encounter and communication will always have fair effects on our understanding of ourselves and others. Communicative Theology, which is done on a cross-cultural conference of Indian and Austrian theologians looks different than when Austrian theologians, are discussing about Communicative Theology among themselves and even there it depends on the actual situation and on the actual participants of the theological process. This leads to the following questions: What does it mean to theologize cross-culturally, communicatively? What is the basis of communication and of encounter according to Cross-cultural or to the Communicative Theology?

Francis D'Sa's reflections are based on his view of reality, which is considered to be a common space for all humans. Reality is said to be three-fold, trinitarian, constituted by three dimensions: the Cosmic, the Divine and the Human and is named the "cosmo-the-andric reality", a term, which he takes over from Raimundo Panikkar. Francis D'Sa writes: "… the Cosmic dimension refers to the spatio-material world of temporality, the Human dimension refers to the experience of an 'I' and a 'You' and the Divine dimension is the inexhaustible character, the open-endedness of the Human and the Cosmic." (Francis D'Sa, Unpublished Script, Pune 2001, 34). This Divine dimension can also be called the Depth-dimension of all. Reality is considered to be our common space, the fundament for the possibility of our encounter. Following this line, D'Sa sees in religion a hermeneutic of reality, the "search of the Human for the Divine in the Cosmic" (Francis D'Sa, Unpublished Script, Pune 2001, 34). This hermeneutic might be quite different, as different religions are focussing upon different dimensions. For example the focus of the Christian tradition lies – according to D'Sa – on the Human dimension, whereas some Hindu traditions are focussing more on the Cosmic dimension, but

nevertheless all dimensions are present in all traditions, as all three dimensions constitute reality. Therefore it is by the encounter with others that one tradition or one person might discover reality more fully or realize one's own hermeneutic more precisely.

Let me have a short look now at the way communicative theologizing takes place. In order to understand and describe the process of communicating, the Communicative Theology adapts the model of the "Theme-centered-Interaction" according to Ruth Cohn. Ruth Cohn was a Jewish lady and was herself not a theologian, but a pedagogue and a psychologist. Ruth Cohn in following approach of this Communicative Theology is departing from actual group experiences and is concerned about the question: How an atmosphere can be created in which fruitful and authentic interaction and communication becomes more likely, in order to avoid or reduce violence and destruction. In order to reach this goal, theologizing communicatively means to try to keep a "dynamic balance" between four aspects of life: the I referring to the world of the individual, of the subject; the We referring to the actual group or community setting; the It referring to the thematic topic and the globe or context. More details about this approach will be given by Matthias Scharer in the second part of this article.

Surely at this point the two approaches are quite different. While D'Sa, inspired by Panikkar, gives a fundamental – as he himself stresses not metaphysical but phenomenological – view of reality, which is the source and the aim of theologizing cross-culturally, Communicative Theology gets its ideas from the observation of actual group and communication processes. Still these two models shall not be separated completely. If Communicative Theology is trying to make an authentic process of understanding and confrontation possible and if Panikkar's view of reality has some truth in it, then the three dimensions of reality will be actualized in each process of theologizing communicatively. Theologizing cross-culturally or communicatively does not mean to deny one's own positions, beliefs or convictions, but it means to take the other – person or tradition – so seriously, that I try to

make the effort to understand himself/herself, as he/she wants to be understood, which is not at all easy. It does not mean the fusion of our horizons, so that in the end we are seeing the world in the same way, but it means the touching of our horizons, in order to understand our own horizon in a deeper and wider way. Due to the encounter or communication with the other – person or tradition or both – I can discover aspects of my own world-view, which would remain hidden otherwise. Therefore, real meeting, real understanding and real communicating implies change and transformation.

4. What has been Transformed? What Changes?

Let me see then for me personally, what has been changed or is still in the process of changing and forming as a result of a few encounter experiences with the Cross-Cultural Theology and with Communicative Theology? It is the challenge of perceiving reality as a cosmotheandric reality and mystery being our common space, which constitutes interconnectedness and relatedness. It is the idea of religion being a hermeneutic of reality, which has consequences for theological thinking, speaking and acting. And perhaps for me one of the most inspiring and astonishing aspects of the Cross-Cultural Theology as Encounter is the close connection between spirituality and reflected, academic theology. It seems to me that this way of theologizing includes spiritual awareness in a very natural way and considers the practice of such awareness essential for theological work.

According to my perception, Communicative Theology works and reflects more on actual communication processes and gives more attention to the problematic aspects of communication like differences in convictions and beliefs, conflicts and destructive emotions. The question concerning the priority of stressing, emphasising either a common space or dividing differences, might be answered differently. It may be that consequently the importance of such a question will be estimated differently as

well. Still beyond these differences Cross-Cultural Theology as well as Communicative Theology share a common concern and draw our attention to the process of theologizing.

II. SOME FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF COMMUNICA-TIVE THEOLOGY (by Matthias Scharer)

1. Communicative Theology (CT) – A Specific Style or Form of Theological Reflection?

Regarding the expression "CT" I agree with Teresa Peter in the first part of this article, that it would be perhaps more appropriate to speak of an "... awareness of theologizing communicatively, [of]... a theology, which is done communicatively" than to use the noun "Communicative Theology". For the time being, I will use this expression. The American theologian Robert L. Kinast would understand our way of theologizing as a specific "style of theological reflection", which was developed on the basis of the theology of the Second Vatican Council.

The reality of theology, which theological reflection seeks to disclose, is the presence of God in people's experience, a presence that invites them to encounter God where they are and to participate in the divine life which is offered to them there. For this reason the form that theological reflection takes is coextensive with people's experience. It does not treat their experience as a theological or spiritual void nor does it use their experience merely to illustrate and apply theological principles. With theological reflection, theology is in service to experience, not the other way around. (Robert l. Kinast, *What are they saying about theological reflection?* Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2000, 3)

According to R. L. Kinast it is a "threefold movement", which the different styles of theological reflection have in common. Starting point for theologizing in a particular style of theological reflection is the actual context, the actual life-experience, then as

a second step of this movement these experiences come in touch with the Christian tradition and as a third step a transformation of one's life is taking place. (See Kinast, 1) It was after the Second Vatican Council, that this common form has generated "various styles of theological reflection" (Kinast, 3). Kinast distinguishes between five different styles, for example the Feminist Style or the Inculturation Style of theological reflection, just to mention two of them.

2. Relation between Form and Content

Using the term "style" for a specific concept of theology like CT leads us immediately to the question of the relation between form and content in theology, which is according to Kinast just another way of expressing the "interplay of substance and style" (Kinast, 4). The way, in which form and content are related to each other and the question, if form and content are related at all, can be seen as essential theological questions themselves. The relation between content and form does also affect the discourse on violence and religion and the shape of all sorts of academic theological activities.

At first, questions concerning the form or style of a theological process might not look like essential theological questions, they look more like didactic, sociological or political questions, which might touch the theological sphere in some way but which are not situated in the center of theology. Why to reflect on the way, in which we are working on an academic theological conference for example? Why to give special attention to the way in which faith communication takes place in the church? In what way can an awareness on the process of theologizing be relevant for the theological outcome and in what way is such an awareness connected to the phenomena of violence and conflicts?

In order to reflect "the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted" (GS1), it is necessary, that sociological or economic analysis takes

place. Most probably, so far, most of the theologians would agree. But can these human experiences be even more relevant to theologians? Can these experiences be taken seriously as "loci theologici"? This is exactly, what I am trying to do in the process of theologizing communicatively. In the following I will present some basic ideas and outlines of this approach.

3. How to Gain Knowledge in the Area of CT?

"Communicative Theology is a way of theologizing which starts with and is done through a living process of communication." (Matthias Scharer, Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *Kommunikative Theologie. Eine Grundlegung,* Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, [2]2003, 15). Taking this seriously, it is obvious that it is quite difficult to explain CT without participating in a living process. At the moment, one of the main research fields for gaining experiences of CT is a master course for postgraduates, which is held at the Theological Faculty of the University of Innsbruck. During a period of five semesters a group consisting of 18 persons, who are working in leadership positions in the church, is introduced to CT and animated to connect the actual group experiences, the everyday life and work experiences, with biblical, systematic, anthropological and practical-theological reflections. Praying, celebrating, eating and drinking together are not seen as accidental or secondary phenomena in this style of theologizing. These so called ordinary group experiences are considered essential parts of the process of theologizing itself, as important as the living discourses on different topics. These selected topics we are dealing with in the group-sessions, originate in the meeting, in the confrontation of group-processes, life experiences and the Gospel and church tradition. In our master course, which is entirely conducted in this style of theologizing, "world-church-experiences" are integrated as an important aspect. If we are really serious in trying to theologize in a communicative way, it will be impossible and irresponsible to ignore the global situation of the church.

Therefore the participants of the course visit small groups in different countries, in order to come in touch with unfamiliar ecclesiastical situations and problems. During September 2004 for example one small group of the present master course has visited several places and institutions in India. In the same way, other groups are visiting South Africa, Kenya or Taiwan. What do these experiences mean in the field of research? Is it not a great risk to use the term "communication" for a specific kind of theologizing?

4. The Ambiguous and (at the same time) Indispensable Discourse about Communication

In fact, Teresa has already shown in her discourse with a Theology as Cross-Cultural Encounter how ambiguous the term communication is and how far away we are from Francis D'Sa's meaning of understanding as a deep acceptance of one another as spirit-gifted subjects. We are living in a knowledge- and communication-based society. Globalization is based on communication. But what is the understanding of communication in the context of globalization? It is very poor actually, it means: Communication = the supply of information.

Information opens up an access to power and also to inclusion or exclusion of people and even peoples. Who has the information (today mainly through the Internet) is "in", who can't get it because she/he is too poor to have a computer, is "out". The inclusion and exclusion of people from information is connected to questions of power, violence and even survival. Whoever is excluded suffers from poverty, lack of knowledge and connections or even is threatened by death.

This can be recognized as an indication for the combat which is taking place between the isolating "gods" (tin gods) of the market cooperating with the media on the one hand, and the relation-bestowing Christian God on the other hand. Let us have a look at the contrasting Church Tradition concerning this point.

5. An Alternative Approach to Society Inspired by Church Tradition and Early Christianity

In our days not only the market but also the church seems to remain in a dangerous unawareness of the consequences of non-reflected adoption of communication skills. The Second Vatican Council glorifies the modern possibilities of communication without reflecting on their impact on exclusion phenomena in the postmodern economic situation. The enormously important point that we are touching here is the following: The problematic effects and consequences, which are connected to modern means of communication, will also affect faith communication if those means are used there. Those methods, means and media are not neutral, but by using particular media in a particular way, a message itself is transported already and might even object the intended content. Let me give an example: If we are using in our teaching, in our dealing with students, a tight curriculum, allowing only the possibilities of agreement or non-agreement or accepting only answers like in a multiple-choice-exam, then already through the adoption of these means of communication a theological content will be transported and a contradiction will be generated to the idea of a human being as it is given in the Gospel. For some people in the Roman Catholic Church it seems to be fascinating to communicate the World Catechism via Internet. But do they know what they are doing by doing it in this way?

From the Church Tradition and especially from early Christianity we can learn that a relation-based form of communication, which considers human beings as dialogical and relational beings, is more adequate to human life than means of communication which ignore this aspect of humanity altogether. Nevertheless, the risk, hidden in the idea of a relation-based communication, is the tendency to overemphasize harmony and to skip or ignore conflict situations. Such an attitude also has enormous consequences for communication, because people remain unknown to themselves and to others (including God) when only the harmonious sides of

life are accepted and dignified. Therefore, at the end of this outline I am going to touch on the importance of a hermeneutic of difference in CT. But before coming to that point, I would like to draw the attention to some basic aspects of a Christian view of communication.

6. Traditional Aspects of Communication

When we are looking – in the process of theologizing communicatively – on our own or people's communicative experiences we are doing it not from a neutral point of view. We are getting our theological orientation from the Israelite experiences of God in the context of the experiences with Jesus of Nazareth and with the Spirit of God, who is active in the community and in creation. In his self-revelation, God reveals himself "for us" as a communicative being as such.

If revelation and belief are a way of relating to the *communicatio* and *communio* with God as a communicative event, in which the personal aspect takes precedence over the informational aspect, every theology will be a communicative event concerned with the trinitarian, communicative God and with the experience of the communicating people of God and of the communication of all people. If the Trinitarian God "...does not just *have* a love relationship with us", but "... *is* loving relationality" (Richard R. Gillardetz, *Transforming our days: Spirituality, Community, and Liturgy in a Technological Culture*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company 2000, 54) – or in the words of the Greek Orthodox bishop and theologian John Zizioulas if we accept God as "Being as Communion" (John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion, Studies in personhood and the Church*, Crestwood NY 1985), this logic cannot remain any longer just in the theoretical field, it has to have consequences on the way in which we are theologizing.

I agree with Richard R. Gaillardetz position that if "...in God's very essence God is loving relationality, Being-as-Communion, so

too we are invited to discover ourselves in the life of communion" (Gillardetz, 56). One consequence, which follows from this conviction, is a dignifying attention given to all persons "...as creatures possessing an infinite worth and dignity" (Gillardetz, 56). Another consequence can be a special attention given to group-processes. In actual group processes we can try to create an atmosphere, which makes an authentic exchange more likely, but we can never force such an authentic exchange. If it is going to happen or not in the end seems to touch the mystery, which is named "grace" in theology.

7. Anthropological approach – Theme-Centered-Interaction (TCI)

In order to give these thoughts a shape, we have to look for an anthropological concept or style of communication in which some of these aspects are realized. In the Communicative Theology we are adapting the so called Theme-centered-Interaction, which has been founded by Ruth C. Cohn after the Second World War in the United States.

7.1. Ruth C. Cohn

Who is Ruth C. Cohn? Ruth C(harlotte) Cohn is a Jewish lady, who was born in Germany in 1912 and is still alive. Her parents wanted her to become an economist but she was more interested in a career as a writer. Ruth Cohn came in touch with psychoanalysis through the mother of her first boy-friend, as that lady was working as a psychoanalyst. During the Second World War she had to emigrate to Switzerland, where she studied psychoanalysis, and later on to the United States. There she came into contact with the humanistic psychology and with pedagogy. Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt-psychology, was one of her first friends in the USA. During the students' riots of 1968 in Germany and France, R. C. Cohn was asked to conduct workshops for students and professors, in order to enable them to communicate without using violence. In 1971 R. Cohn was honored "Psychologist
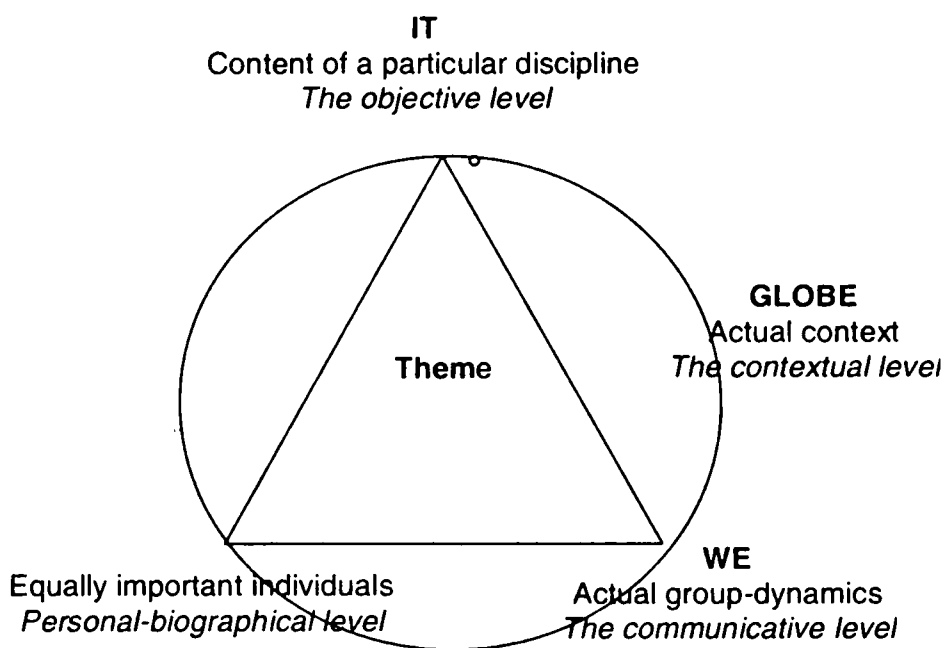
of the Year Award" by the New York Society for Clinical Psychology. At first Ruth Cohn did not want to return to Europe, especially to Germany, but in 1974 she did nevertheless, and now she is living in Switzerland. The University of Hamburg awarded the honorary doctor to her. Ruth Cohn's work rests upon a humanistic idea of her mankind, which is based on biblical fundaments.

7.2. Levels of TCI

According to the concept of TCI there are four different levels, which are present in each communication process. These four levels are the following:

√ each individual – equally important – person (I),
√ the group dynamics in the actual group (WE),
√ the content, on which the group is actually working (IT),
√ the context, the globe, in which the process is happening (GLOBE).

Ruth Cohn states that all these levels are equally important and that sufficient attention has to be given to all of them, in order to enter into a living process of communication.

IT
Content of a particular discipline
The objective level

Theme

GLOBE
Actual context
The contextual level

Equally important individuals
Personal-biographical level

WE
Actual group-dynamics
The communicative level

The theme originates in a dynamic balance of all four levels and is finally fixed in an adequate verbalization, which enables the group to stick to a particular focus for a particular time period. Methods and media which are used in a particular communication process have to be adapted to the theme of the process.

7.3. The normative system of TCI

TCI is based on the three following axioms:

♦ Every human being is autonomous and interdependent at the same time.
♦ Reverence has to be paid to all living things their development.
♦ Freedom and free decisions are limited by inner and outer boundaries, still an extension of those boundaries is possible.

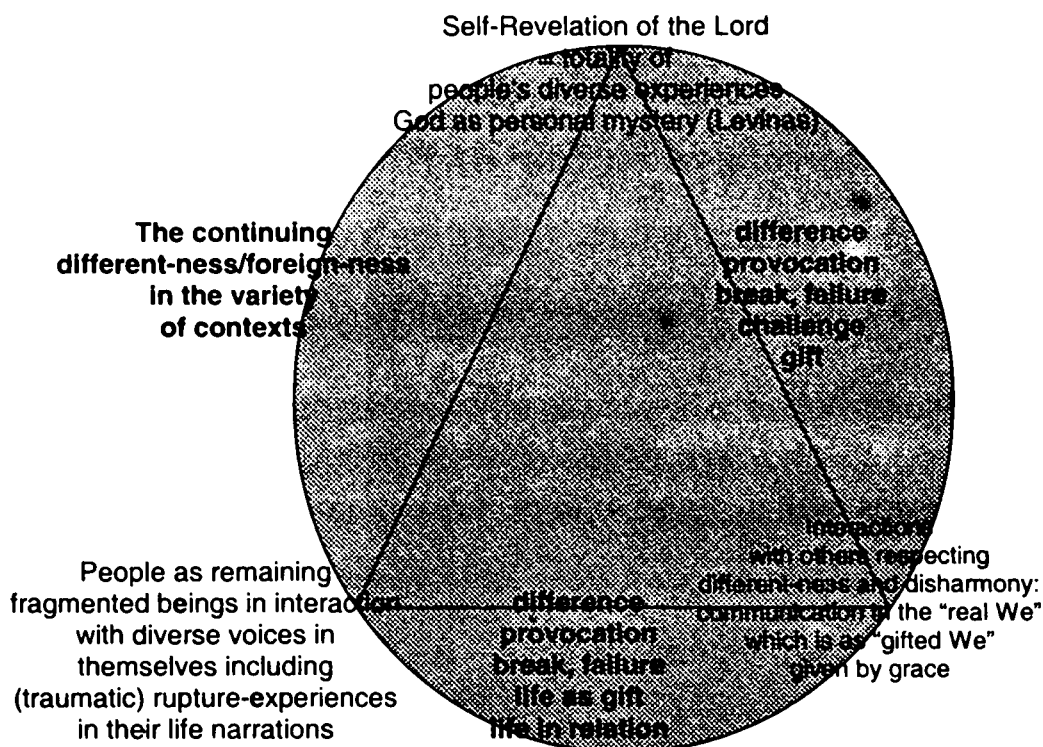As the two main postulates Ruth Cohn defines the following:

♦ Be your own chairperson.
♦ Disturbances and passionate involvements take precedence.

By maintaining these axioms and postulates, a particular style of conducting a group conduction and group work will be aimed at, which gives special attention to a participative style of conduction in groups and communication processes.

8. Hermeneutics of Difference

When we are speaking about a Communicative Theology initiating theological processes in the style of TCI we have to insist on a Hermeneutics of Difference and on the acceptance of difference. Difference is a metaphor for the variety of challenges, provocations and failures, which are shaping the relations between different people, but also between human beings and God. A Hermeneutics of Difference insists on an idea of God as a mystery like E. Levinas maintained. This approach stresses the idea of a human being as an ever remaining fragmented subject, who can never know everything about himself/herself or others. Accepting different-ness and foreign-ness, on all levels of self-communication and communication with others, including our prayers, does not deny the different failures of oneself and others, but opens up for

life as God's gift. The above illustration will then be complemented in the following way.

Self-Revelation of the Lord

totality of people's diverse experiences
God as personal mystery (Levinas)

The continuing different-ness/foreign-ness in the variety of contexts

difference provocation break, failure challenge gift

People as remaining fragmented beings in interaction with diverse voices in themselves including (traumatic) rupture-experiences in their life narrations

God difference provocation break, failure life as gift life in relation

interaction with others respecting different-ness and disharmony: communication of the "real We" which is a "gifted We" given by grace

Communicative-theological processes are found at the interface of theological research on the one hand and of the practice of faith and religion on the other hand. This practice provokes a theological reflection again in return and this reflection is nourished by the actual practices and experiences. In the field of this interplay of theological reflection and communicative practice of faith and religion, the perspective of a hermeneutics of difference can be considered as a productive challenge for an intercultural and interreligious dialogue, which gives special theological attention also to conflictive encounter-experiences.