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DOCTORAL THESIS

Nonverbal Communication in the Rite of Elevation during the Holy Mass

SUMMARY

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SUMMARY

Using the terminology of communication studies, we can say that in the rite of the Elevation we are studying in our thesis, all the basis and conditions of communication are given for an interpersonal relationship to be established between the Transcendent and the person as an active participant and agent, as well as for an interpersonal team-group communication among the agents themselves. The persons as agents thus enter into communion not only with the Transcendent, but also with each other. This individual and communal communication reaches its peak in the moment of the Elevation of the Lord (its fulfillment takes place in the communion of the Eucharist). Through the gestural sign of the Elevation, the Transcendent (Christ), who has come among us, „informs” us of His presence (in the form of bread and wine). The scene is given (e.g., the church), the place where the event occurs, the „sacred space” that receives the event, and the recipient – the agent (person) – who, through their preparation (theological knowledge), creates and connects to this scene. The communicator is the Transcendent Himself (Jesus Christ), who transmits His message through a communicative channel (symbols, real-symbols) and manifests the message through a „specialist” (the priest), using both verbal and nonverbal signs. As in all communication, the Elevation (revelation of the Lord) also takes place through signs. This communication occurs through specific types of signs, symbols, and codes – signs whose meaning is associated with an additional, supernatural meaning accessible only through faith, which the agents decode through learning, based on their level of preparation of own training, since the communicator and the receiving agents share a common set of signs. The information conveyed by the communicator can be decoded by the believing agent, who understands the message encoded in the signs. The Elevation appears as a communicative code, a signifying code with meaning. It consists of signs (bread and wine) which together form the communicative message. By convention, these signs represent the body and blood of Christ at the moment of consecration. It must be decoded as a conative code – that is, a code that not only carries information for the agent but also motivates further action, practical commitment (the liturgy’s impact on everyday life). Decoding – since it is not self-evident for everyone – requires „preparation” (theological knowledge, faith). Reason alone does not lead to the recognition of God's mystery; rather, it is reason supported by faith, since only this faith-assisted reason is capable of recognizing, receiving, accepting, and entrusting itself to

the mystery of God. The signs carry additional meaning: the static signs of bread and wine (as food and drink) are transformed during consecration into dynamic signs (the personal presence of Christ in the appearance of bread and wine). In the rite, dynamic symbolic actions (the priest's words of consecration, along with accompanying micro-gestures and dramatizing gestures) are added to the static signs (bread and wine), thereby transforming them into dynamic signs. The rite of the Elevation is surrounded by both strong codes – that is, those which clearly, explicitly, and intensely communicate a message (words of consecration, dramatized gestures, kneeling, prayer) – and weak codes – that is, those that are more ambiguous and sometimes culture-dependent (liturgical vestments, candles, incense, bells), all of which are parts of verbal and nonverbal communication. The act of Elevation is a nonverbal sign that supports and enhances the presentation of the verbal message (the words of consecration).

The nonverbal gesture of the Elevation is surrounded by several presenting codes. The role of these codes is to offer a closer presentation of the transcendent person revealed during the Elevation to the agents, in the form of an auditory and visual „image.” In the interpersonal communication initiated by the Communicator (the Transcendent), the agent is addressed both individually (at the base of the communication „V”) and as a community (at the upper part of the „V”). The purpose of the individual address is to form a community (communio) among the agents, through which the communicative „V” becomes open and expansive. During the Elevation, an interaction takes place: the act is aimed at transmitting information, conveying a fact with the intention of initiating a fundamental transformation. The revelatory nature of the Elevation (presenting the presence of the Transcendent) serves to facilitate interaction between God and humanity, and also among human beings themselves – so that a foundational transformation (communio) may occur at both the individual and communal levels of the agent. This fundamental change is offered to the agent in the gesture of the Elevation and in the surrounding micro-rituals, as presented to us by the Transcendent – for instance, through the liturgical vestments, which symbolize the eschatological human being, Christ, and thus possess an invitational power. The personal communication with the Transcendent, realized in the ritual of the Elevation, reaches its fullness in the moment of feedback – when the will of the Communicator (the Transcendent) meets the will of the receiving

agent (the human being), who collaborates with Him (communio between the Communicator and the agent, as well as among the agents themselves).

The „basic cell”, the „center and summit” of the Holy Mass is the consecration. It is the moment when Christ – true God and real man, who died for us on the cross, rose from the dead, and was glorified – gifts us, the faithful participants in the liturgical act, with His real presence. He does so in a way that His whole life is present in His person, especially His Paschal Mystery. Thus, at the moment of consecration, Christ comes among us at the Eucharistic gathering with His dynamic personal self-revelation and history, for the exalted Lord bears forever on His body the marks of His life and Passion, the wounds of Good Friday (cf. Jn 20:20). This core of the Holy Mass contains the words of Jesus at the Last Supper (the *verba Domini*), the words of consecration, and as such, it belongs to the part of verbal communication. As we have seen, this verbal core of the liturgical act is complemented and deepened on three levels by nonverbal channels of communication.

Even the very words of consecration, spoken by the priest *in persona Christi*, are accompanied by nonverbal codes. The priest not only pronounces the words of Christ, but also, through his actions and gestures – on a nonverbal level – identifies with Christ present among His disciples in the the Last Supper room. He not only says what Christ said, but also does what Christ did. Thus, the priest identifies with Christ on both a verbal and a nonverbal level, and in doing so, the celebrant – who puts on Christ and becomes one with Him – makes not only the voice of Christ to the faithful, but also, through dramatizing gestures, makes Christ’s personal presence visibly manifest. This nonverbal communication is therefore inseparably united with the verbal, and through this unity, the *representatio Domini* becomes externally concrete to the faithful participating in the sacred setting of the liturgy. On the one hand, these nonverbal dramatizing gestures express the unity of the present Christ and the celebrating priest; on the other hand, they serve the deepening of contemplation for the faithful community gathered in the sacred space of worship. They give visual form to the audible but invisible words, thereby enabling a deeper and more intense experience of the mystery for the liturgical assembly, liturgical community.

As the second nonverbal level, we can refer to the Elevation itself and the accompanying rites. The ritual of the Elevation takes place immediately following the

moment of consecration. It is closely connected to it and is the culmination of the liturgical act's nonverbal dimension: it displays the exalted Lord who has come among us in the consecration. The Elevation (*elevatio maior*), which developed around the year 1200, was intended to make visible the invisible transformation that lies at the heart of our liturgical gathering. The ritual of the Elevation is thus a dramaturgical moment in a broader strategy of liturgical staging, one which seeks to depict the abstract doctrine of transubstantiation within the concrete „here and now” of the liturgical act. With this new rite – introduced during the High Middle Ages into the very center of the Mass – the Church sought to render visible the imperceptible change that occurs during the consecration: to bring into focus the invisible aspect of transubstantiation, which eludes both human senses and human reason. Through this, Christ – truly present though invisibly under the species of bread and wine – is presented to the liturgical assembly. The rite of the Elevation is surrounded by several micro-rites, which are themselves nonverbal codes seeking to illuminate the presence of Christ who comes among us. These micro-rites may thus be interpreted as a kind of „ritual image-collage,” each revealing a particular „face/contour” or „aspect” of the person of Christ who becomes present in the moment of transubstantiation. Each of these liturgical micro-elements directs our attention toward the Christ revealed in the Elevation. The purpose and liturgical function of the Elevation and its surrounding micro-rites is to point to Christ. In fulfilling this function, they serve to make possible the encounter between the earthly and the heavenly, the immanent and the Transcendent, between Creator and creature – right in the ontological focal point of transubstantiation.

One of the important micro-rites within the ritual of the Elevation is the gesture of kneeling, which, in this sacred moment, applies both to the faithful and to the celebrating priest. It is performed out of reverence for the real presence of Christ. This nonverbal gesture expresses and illustrates, in the most profound and intimate way, that both the celebrant and the gathered faithful are entering into a living, vibrant relationship – into dynamic communication – with the Transcendent. Immediately following the priest's nonverbal address to Christ – the act of kneeling – a verbal acclamation directed to Christ is proclaimed: *Mysterium fidei* – “The mystery of faith!” This *Mysterium fidei* refers specifically to the person of Christ. It is an *acclamatio ad Christum*, a direct address to Christ, the very mystery of our faith. The faithful join in this verbal greeting

to Christ, doing so in a direct, personal, and grammatical second-person singular form: „*We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again.*” This combined verbal (*Mysterium fidei*) and nonverbal (the priest’s genuflection, the faithful kneeling) address functions as a metacommunicative message, particularly in terms of *proxemics* (the regulation of spatial distance), which vividly illustrates the dynamic of the relationship between God and man. For when the praying person moves from a standing posture to kneeling, the perceived distance between God and humanity increases, dramatically expressing the asymmetry between human and divine.

The micro-rite of incensation (*incensum*), which engages both the sense of sight through the rising cloud of incense and the sense of smell through its fragrance, becomes a channel of communication for our relationship with God. The symbolism of incense carries the story of Christ (the birth of Jesus: cf. Mt 2:11; incense as a wholly burnt offering: the sacrificial death of Christ), and by pointing to the priestly function of the Messiah and expressing His divinity, it also reveals Christ’s person to us. The symbolism of incensation is richest at the moment of the Elevation, for it not only signifies the ascent of prayer to God (cf. Ps 141–142), but also conveys more than a gesture of reverence: it illustrates the approach and manifestation of Christ who enters the liturgical assembly. The cloud of incense and its transparency symbolize the mysterious presence of God. During the Elevation, the incense’s smoke and scent – serving as a channel between the visible and the invisible – communicate God’s mysterious presence. They simultaneously veil and reveal the Transcendent God who manifests among us.

The micro-rite of bell ringing (*campana* and *campanula*) is likewise deeply meaningful within the ritual of the Elevation. Although it was originally introduced for its signaling function, today its devotional role is emphasized. The sound of bells and chimes announces and accompanies the mystical entrance of Christ and invites us to fix our gaze upon the risen Lord – He who, by His death, conquered death and is now present among us in glory. The ringing expresses the gratitude, joy, and jubilation of the assembled liturgical community; it gives voice to the comprehensive adoration and praise of heaven and earth, while symbolizing the glory of Christ.

In contrast, the use of the wooden clapper (*crepitacula*) during the liturgies of the Paschal Triduum draws our attention to the Lord’s Passion and death. Thus, we can say that while the bells (*campanae*) and chimes (*campanulae*) proclaim the Resurrection

of Christ, the clapper (*crepitacula*) focuses on the redemptive death of the Savior. Both instruments – conveying nonverbal messages – through their devotional function, reflect the two most important events of our salvation history: the crucifixion (clapper) and the resurrection (bells and chimes) of Jesus Christ, while taking into account the character of the respective liturgical season (Easter: joy; Holy Week: sorrow and mourning).

During the rite of the Elevation, several illustrative „elements” appear, through which the Invisible Presence becomes visible. These „elements” function as weak, connotative codes: their meaning is not strictly defined but open to multiple layers of interpretation. With their subtle embrace, they do not draw attention to themselves, but to Christ, and through Him, to that transcendent Reality which enters the horizon of human experience from beyond the world of the senses.

Such „elements” include liturgical vestments, candles, floral decorations, and sacred vessels.

The symbolic meaning of the vestment becomes particularly pronounced at the liturgical „summit” of the Elevation. From the holy moment of the consecration – this ontological turning point – the symbolism of the liturgical garment reaches its fullness: it represents the eschatological Man who steps into our midst in the light of the Resurrection – Jesus Christ, the Savior. The candle likewise bears deep symbolism. The light of the candles used in the liturgy ultimately derives from the Paschal candle, from that flame which carries the light of the risen Christ. Every candle becomes a part of this light and thus a visible bearer of the mystery of the Resurrection. During the Elevation, the candle's symbolism reaches its deepest meaning. From the moment of consecration, the flame of the candle no longer merely points forward to the upcoming event, but reflects the living presence of Christ.

The light of the candle – which burns by consuming itself – is a living image of Christ's sacrifice: it depicts, within the earthly limits of space and time, the presence of the Lamb who was slain and yet lives, the risen One.

The primary purpose of floral decoration in the liturgy is not to achieve technical or aesthetic perfection, but rather to reflect, within the imperfections of our earthly existence, a faint glimpse of the perfection of divine beauty. The living flower – just like the burning, living wax candle – is meant to be a mirror of the Incarnate Word's living presence and beauty. In its fragile beauty, the flower simultaneously bears the glory of

the Resurrection, the mysterious „fragrance” of divine life, and the memory of the Savior’s living and love-born sacrifice. In the liturgy, sacred objects and vessels are not merely aesthetic decorations but bearers of the sacred presence; not mere externals, but perceptible revelations of the divine mystery. These sacred objects have an iconic nature: in their material form, they make the invisible divine reality – the presence of the transcendent mystery – perceptible and contemplative.

This liturgical sensitivity holds particular significance in today’s cultural context, whose most striking feature is that we live in a world of signs. Visuality has become the primary medium of communication: reality is perceived as truly real only when it can be seen, when it is made visible to the eye. The formal focus of expression has shifted toward visibility. When someone wants to communicate something, they most often do so through images or visually perceptible forms. What is not visible or directly perceptible is increasingly pushed to the background, appearing only as a blurred, uncertain dimension. In this cultural environment, authority is also linked to visibility. What is perceptible, what can be experienced, becomes credible. Amid these challenges, it becomes all the more urgent that the liturgical space – which is inherently theophanic in nature, as it serves the presence of God and strives to evoke the heavenly liturgy – should, through sacred objects and material beauty, worthily and authentically mediate the divine reality, and thus speak to the heart and mind of contemporary people through the language of visibility. In liturgy, therefore, it is no longer sufficient to merely dogmatize or moralize faith; the aesthetic dimension of faith must also be emphasized. An approach is needed that addresses not only the intellect but also involves the entirety of the human sensory world in the experience of faith. Religious experience must speak not only to the intellect but also to the soul, the senses, and inner resonance. A person with aesthetic sensitivity is able to encounter God through beauty. Through this encounter, one recognizes how far above them God is, but also experiences how close God has come – through the incarnation of His Son.

In such an experience, the soul is deeply moved, because it senses that beauty is not merely aesthetic pleasure, but a message from another, purer order of Reality. A person thus touched transcends the limits of everyday existence. Beauty is not a human creation, not something that can be produced through human effort, but a gift that comes from above, from the transcendent world – a gift that points beyond the stage of our

earthly life. Beauty is, at its core, a theological reality capable of opening the human gaze to the eternal. A vocation unfolds within it that does not point to itself, but to the Reality that becomes present to us under the veil of symbol as beauty. And as the Invisible (the Beautiful) shines through the visible (the beautiful), one becomes aware of the deeper meaning of their own existence. The aesthetic dimension of liturgy corresponds well to the „aesthetic hunger” of our postmodern age, even if this hunger is, by default, often for much less than what the liturgy, by its nature, can offer. Although religion seems to be receding in today’s spectacle-driven civilization – and even among believers, faith is often only occasional, superficial, and limited to social interaction, with religious practice nearly absent from everyday life – Rainer Bucher (* 1956), pastoral theologian, makes a telling observation. He writes that, in the religious marketplace of the postmodern era, „liturgy appears to be one of the Church’s most marketable offerings: low-threshold, open to interpretation, requires no consent, well-founded, free of charge, sensory-rich, full of experiences, comforting, and promises transcendent protection and blessing”.

Liturgy is about the symbolic experience of God’s mystery, as a sacred and life-liberating power that not only surpasses all immanent, earthly forces, but also has the capacity to transform them unexpectedly and surprisingly. The aesthetic representation of this divine mystery takes place through numerous verbal and nonverbal elements, within the celebrating, concrete assembly, since divine revelation can only take on aesthetic form in unity with its receiver. The aesthetic structure of the liturgy seeks, above all, to open the human senses to an encounter with the Lord. In this encounter, the closeness of the Redeemer who comes among us not only touches people but transforms them according to the image and likeness of His unconditional love. The aesthetic dimension of liturgy – with its auditory and visual, verbal and nonverbal elements – enables a refined and sensually engaging encounter between God and humanity. It reaches the whole person – body and soul – but above all, it touches the sensory, bodily human being in such a way that it „guides them beyond themselves”. The Elevation, then, is the visible mediator of the Word’s manifestation under the species of bread and wine. It is through this moment that the encounter becomes possible. Yet the Elevation is not only a facilitator of this encounter, but also a promoter of transformation in the power of the Absolute Beauty – a path toward becoming a beautiful person.

Indeed, the beautiful person is the living evangelical book who walks with both feet on the ground, whom the people of today „read”, and from whom they may draw inspiration for faith. As we well know, the words of Pope Paul VI – „*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers – and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are also witnesses*” (Evangelii nuntiandi 41) – have never been more relevant than they are today.

Only the beautiful person can be an authentic witness to the faith. Moreover, the Elevation greatly helps the human person to recognize, in the encounter with the Transcendent, the personal nature of God. For in the Elevation, the person of Christ is revealed before our eyes – it gives a visible „face” to the invisible God in our midst – and thereby effectively counterbalances the impersonal concept of God that has become widespread today, especially among the youth, a concept that sees God merely as a spirit, a special force, energy, or a higher being. The rite of the Elevation may well serve as a liturgical remedy for the spiritual symptoms of our age, as it presents the transcendent God even within the immanent, while still preserving His transcendence. In doing so, it clearly reveals to the contemporary seeker that God – who comes personally to meet humanity, to encounter the human being as a person – remains Transcendent even in His closeness; that He is an objective Person, who through His manifestation among us and interpersonal communication with us, sustains our orientation toward transcendence. The rite of the Elevation thus stands in clear opposition to a religious tendency characteristic of our time, which favors belief in an immanent God („the one who lives within me”) over the transcendent God.

Only a rite that is enriched by real encounters and relationships with concrete people can bear authentic witness to the love of God’s mystery and bring it to fulfillment. Such a rite can be, for our contemporaries, the ritual of the Elevation, which is the nonverbal midpoint and climax of the Eucharistic Prayer, the central and most outstanding act of the Mass. As such, it is the aesthetic pinnacle of the entire Eucharistic action, though its fulfillment is reached in the moment of Communion.

As we have previously seen, the rite of the Elevation – together with its accompanying micro-rites and illustrative „props” – proclaims the manifestation of the Transcendent in the immanent, presents the Son of Man who comes among us, makes the Invisible dwelling in eternity visible within the coordinates of time and space; in

short, it makes the visit of the otherworldly Reality into our world perceivable, allowing us to experience the God who dwells among us. The perceptible experience and conscious living of the present moment, along with its performative realization, is of utmost importance for modern people. It is this that allows them to tangibly experience in the liturgy that God is not indifferent to human destiny but is an active participant in their lives. He is the One to whom we can turn with trust in our fears, needs, desires, and requests, for He is present and acts for us. The rite of the Elevation is especially suited to making the present God tangible in the present – in our present – for its very mission, its liturgical function, is to make the Unexperientable experientable, to reveal the Hidden One. This rite makes attention to the person of Christ and places Him at the center of our contemplative gaze. It focuses on that ontological moment which is determinative for our entire Eucharistic celebration. Without doubt, the rite of the Elevation – along with its accompanying elements – can serve to intensify devotion and strengthen reverence born of living faith toward the Lord who is present. It emphasizes the sacrificial character of the Mass and thereby creates a healthy balance between the sacrificial and meal aspects of the Eucharist. It „enriches” horizontal communication with the key vertical dimension that defines all.

It is also essential to mention the „missionary” character of the rite of the Elevation. By its very nature, it does not merely serve to deepen and strengthen the faith and personal relationship with God of the believing person, but through its aesthetic „garment” – as the robe of God’s glory – it exerts such a powerful invitational force that it may even make the „silent rustle” of the divine presence perceivable to those who have not yet received the gift of faith. Many converts testify that the unusual silence during the words of consecration, and the raising of the host and the chalice, struck them as a deeply moving confession of faith by the gathered liturgical community. God’s presence is constant and can be experienced continuously in every human life, regardless of whether one recognizes it or not. The task of the believer is not to prove this, but to live it, proclaim it, and make others aware that God is present in every person’s life. In the moment of the Elevation, the liturgical behavior of the believer – inspired by divine presence – can move even our non-believing contemporaries who enter the church. At the same time, it can nourish the God-seeking journey of so-called „Zacchaeus-Christians”: those who feel like outsiders in the Church, but are nevertheless interested

in faith; who do not consider themselves believers in the traditional sense, but are open to faith, seeking truth and spiritual experience.

In light of our research, we can conclude by saying that the rite of the Elevation has lost none of its relevance in our time; on the contrary, it holds increasing significance as a nonverbal ritual for those participating in the liturgy. This rite not only draws our attention to the personal presence of Christ among us but also facilitates our encounter with Him. Moreover, through the communication that flows from this encounter, it brings our relationship with God into balance, guides it along the right path, and, not least, deepens it.