

# 6.2 Introduction to Communication Theology

## Aim

To revise the basic notion of communication: terms, meaning, mediums, implications for understanding the Biblical revelation and pastoral milieu from a communication point of view.

## Materials Required

- A Bible,
- Commentaries on the Bible

### Input

#### A. Basics of Communication:

Communication is a substantial and essential aspect of being human. Being human means communicating because human beings are social beings.

Permeating every aspect of human life, communication is interdisciplinary, i.e. it entails an intrinsic relationship with other life disciplines: sociology, psychology etc.

Christianity is a religion of communication. God first communicated himself to us. *“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world”.* **Heb 1:1-2**

He communicates himself for our salvation: *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.* **Jn. 3:16**

He urges us to communicate the good news of salvation to the world: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* **Matt 28:19-20.**

Human beings are created in God’s image: capable of communication with and being communicated to by God.

**a. Communication:** Communication is from the Latin word *communis* meaning common. It is the process of interaction between persons/people by construction and use of signs and meanings. It is both Divine-Human and inter-human and is characterized by sharing and participation. It concerns the ability to make signs, to encode and decode so as to live in a meaningful world and to build bridges with others. Thus when we communicate, we establish commonness.

a1 Media: Refers to the methods, means or instruments used for interaction.

a2 Information/Message: The linear sender-receiver model by which content is transmitted from source to receiver. It is the formulated content to be transmitted.

**b. Experience:** This is the context in which we communicate. It is within our experiences that we encode or decode messages. Thus difficulties arise with messages outside our experience, both from sending and receiving perspectives.

Symbols: It is an arbitrary sign which comes into existence by convention, rule or assent. It is something used deliberately to take the place of something else. It may be verbal, (spoken word: proverb, advice, song), graphic (written word) or representational (emblem, artifact). Human beings not only understand symbolic interactions with each other and with God, but are also able to create symbols.

**c. Language:** This is a system of symbols used for communication. It is essential in the growth and transmission of culture, values and ensuring the continuity of a community. Linguistic communication is foundational to all human social interaction. Through language, we analyse and share worldviews, psychological processes of individuals and societies.

**d. Noise:** This is any interference in the proper decoding of received message. It can be immaterial: mood of the receiver, language not understood, or material: physical noise which affects the audibility of the message.

## Components of Communication

- Source
- Message
- Channel (medium)
- Receiver. (the effect)

### **Implication for Christian Communication:**

Is communication **Church-centred** (who), **receiver-centred** (to whom), **message-centred** (what), **channel media-centred** (how) or **goal-centred** (with what effect)? These elements should be evenly balanced for communication to be effective.

### **Divine-Human Communication: Biblical Paradigms**

The God of Biblical revelation is a God who communicates: God's creative action is self-revelation- God wanting to be known, wanting to speak, wanting to communicate with his creatures, to enter into a covenant with humankind.

#### Divine-human communication is a gift of God:

- It is not presented as a once and for all event, but as a continuous, unending process.
- Creation of man in God's own image, creation of the woman as a dialogue-partner at par with him has rich significance for our understanding of a God who communicates continuously with us.

The Fall (sin) causes a breakdown in the divine-human relationships, in the intra-human communication and our interaction with the cosmos. It replaces the God-centred dialogue with man-made monologue.

The OT narrates God's constant desire to re-establish the disrupted dialogue through a historiography which asserts Israel's knowledge of God as one intervenes decisively in their favour.

Through this dialogue (communication) God participates in the life of his people: in Egypt, at Sinai, at the Red Sea and in the desert.

By this dialogue, Israel becomes God's communication partner, a sign of universal salvation to other nations. This is mediated through the prophets, teachers, scriptures and events of history.

God's creative-communicative action is described by the Hebrew word, *dabar*. It refers to God's action of saving. God communicating in and through the ordinary events of history means he recognises human culture.

God's revelation is incarnational: 'God reveals through himself, not in spite of humanity or through the veil of humanity, but in and through humanity.'

### **African Dimension of Divine Communication**

The Jewish starting point of divine communication is God's manifestation in their history which leads them to affirm his presence.

-The African on the other hand, has nature as the starting point. They marvel at the wonder of creation, how natural things serve their needs, the living that they make out of natural things, and see a Supreme Being behind it all.

-This leads them easily to identify God with mountains, trees, rivers and other natural things. In many African cultures, these are mediations of the divine, in the big rivers, the big trees and high lofty mountains is the encounter with the divine.

-These objects are held as sacred and where they are located are demarcated as sacred places.

- Symbolism is very prominent in African life.

- The felt phenomena, the visible object is very vital to African communication of the divine.

## **Review**

1. Communication Theology has helped us look at how God has communicated and still communicates to his people.
2. We also evaluated terms like communication, media, Information, message, experience, language and noise which are vital to communication.
3. Divine communication is to us in our fallen state. From an African perspective, our encounter with nature mediates God's presence. Signs and symbols play a major role in communication in the African context.

## **Reflection**

1. Choose a passage/event from the OT and analyse the Divine-human interaction from a communication perspective?
2. What should be the present day attitude of the church to culture and language? Discuss



## Relevant Skills

1. Anthropomorphism, use of symbols, provides a greater efficacy to Divine-human revelation when seen from a communication point of view. Contrast the Jewish view of barred images and the prolific presence of symbols among Africans.
2. Enact a role play based on the OT to bring into sharper focus the Divine-human dialogue.
3. Analyse the relationship between creation and the exodus covenant from a communication perspective.
4. Is symbolism equal to idolatry? What do you say about the images we have in the Church and in homes?

## Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA, 2000. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini

## References

Graeme Burton *Teaching Communication* London, Routledge 1990.

Eilders, Franz-Josef. *Communicating in Community: An Introduction to Social Communication*. Manila: Logos Publications 1994.