

# 7.1 Christianity - A Religion of Communication

## Aim

- ☉ To create an awareness of communication as a basis of Christianity
- ☉ To realise that communion with God and with creation is the goal of Christian communication.

## Materials Required

- ☉ Copy of the Bible
- ☉ Church Documents: *Communio et Progressio*, *Dei Verbum*, *Dominium et Vivificantem*

## Procedure

Form small groups of 4-6 people and ask them to read the Prologue, Jn 1, 1-18 with the following questions in mind:

1. What are the various communication elements in this passage?
2. What is the significance of the 'incarnation' for a Christian's communication with the world?
3. 'Christianity is a religion of communication' - with this theme in mind each group is to design a visual presentation – art, drama, song, body language etc.

## Input

Communication is an interactive endeavour involving a Sender who conveys a Message by a Medium to a Receiver who decodes the message and gives Feedback. Without any Noise/Distortion, the process goes on smoothly. From this angle we are going to consider the Christian communication, where God the Father sends a Message (Christ) through the Medium of the Holy Spirit.

### The Father is the Sender

In *Dei Verbum* (64) we see reflected Karl Rahner's concept of God's self-communication. 'God, who is infinite spirit, comes close to the visible world... by communicating himself to Man in the Holy Spirit.' Through this same action of revelation, Man, who is in the image and likeness of God and capable of communicating with God, can draw near to God.

Our ability to communicate, for instance, our love for God flows from God's primordial communication: God first communicating to us, a communication that makes all other communication possible. So our communication is response to God's communication. This communication is a gift, to be received. God communicates life and love. All creation is from him and he created it out of unconditional love. The height of his communication is Jesus Christ, who is both the Medium and the Message. Jn 1:1 can be translated as 'In the beginning, God expressed himself.'

### The Son: The Medium and the Message

The Message can be seen from three aspects: the meaning, the symbols used and the form or organisation of the message. God organised his message (love) in the most perfect symbol, the Word, the person of Jesus Christ. (Jn 1, 1-5, 18).

The form of this message is the Incarnation, by which Jesus took our human nature. This Incarnational communication was God's self-communicating action towards all creation. The purpose of this message (Incarnation) was to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to reconcile creation back to the creator, the primordial communicator. The Incarnation is principally a demonstration of God's love. (cf. Jn 3: 16).

Christ in addition to being the message is also the medium of God's communication, just like he is both the priest offering the sacrifice and the victim being offered in sacrifice.

It is through him that God's communication of love gets to the intended receivers. It is the whole life of Christ (the longing for the Messiah, the virginal birth, His lifestyle, his hidden years in Nazareth, his social status and carpenter's son, his teachings, his controversial life, his passion, death and resurrection) that form the embodiment of this communication/revelation.

Through supernatural deeds (miracles) and power of authority, he conveyed this message of love, that people marvelled at him (Mk. 1:22). The Papal Instruction on Communication of May 23, 1971 portrays Christ as the saving communicator and master of communication. As the Word of the Father through whom all things were



made, He is the Father's supreme Gift and Message to people. Through Him, the Father's design and wisdom in love is communicated to us. As communicator and communication, he is the Word who was with God in the beginning and sent to world.

The person and message of Christ has to be contextualized and inculturated in our societies. This contextualization and inculturation is an on-going process.

### **The Holy Spirit: The Encoder and Decoder**

Encoder refers to the process of turning ideas and feelings into recognisable symbols. God's communication of love was facilitated (encoded) by the power of the Holy Spirit at the virginal conception and birth of Christ (Mt. 1:20; Lk 1, 35). The encoded message has to be decoded, i.e. the symbols have to be given meaning. They should have a place in the thought pattern of the receivers. This process of decoding is also made possible through the power and intervention of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who prompts and inspires us, prays in and with us, consoles, strengthens and sanctifies us to enable us proclaim Jesus as Lord.

### **The Human Person: The Receiver**

The target of the message is the receiver. The end point of God's revelation, his communication in the power of the Holy Spirit, is human beings, as created in the image and likeness of God. This identity with God enables us to be capable of receiving the message and be in the same frame of mind with God. God communicates to us in our human context: culture, language, experience, affections and sinfulness. His message comes to identify with our human weakness and calls us to transcend them.

### **Feedback**

Feedback is the reaction of the receiver to the message, which might call for another action (message) from the sender. It shows the type of reception the message gets. In our context, it refers to our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our saviour, which we show in prayer, conversion, Bible reading and active participating in establishing the kingdom of God. This is positive feedback. Negative feedback is seen in our indifference to the Gospel message and continuous persistence in our sinful life.

### **Distortion/Noise**

It is the totality of attitudes and variables that prevent us from heeding the good news of salvation. They could be cultural, philosophical, psychological, moral, spiritual or political. Sin is the embodiment of all distortion, where we freely or unconsciously choose not to receive God's communication: Jesus Christ.

### **African Dimension of the Christian Communication**

African traditional culture is founded on the individual having their identity rooted in their social roots and belonging. The individual always identifies in relation to the other. Thus society plays a major role in communication. The society acts as the authority, with the symbolic system of communication to which the individuals identify themselves.

## **Review**

Communion is the ultimate goal of the Christian faith. The establishment and maintenance of an intimate relationship - communion, *koinoinia* is paramount in God's intention of communication. He wants a personal relationship with the human beings he created. This is what we see in the Trinitarian self-communication described above. Love is the motivating factor of God's creation and communication. This love is personalized in Jesus Christ, who is incarnated in our world through the power of the Holy Spirit (encoded). The same Spirit enables us to receive and accept God's communication into our lives (decode). However, not all of us respond positively (negative feedback), hampered by many factors (distortions). Positive response will result in justice, truth, peace and love while indifference leaves us in the darkness of sin.

## **Reflection**

Christian communication is challenging, disturbing and unexpected. It makes a claim and calls for a response. The response to our Christian call is a healthy relationship with each other, the members of Christ's body. We are called upon to build a human community where love, justice, truth and peace prevail.

## **Relevant Skills**

Draw a model of communication based on Jn 1:1-18

## **Resource**

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

