

# *Christian Communications, Arts and Culture*

## **THE GREATNESS OF WRITING**

What makes great writing is living in, and understanding greatness. We can have a natural gift, and richly develop it into an outstanding skill, but it is what we write about which constitutes the greatness of writing, i.e. the writing of greatness. We can be lacking in developed skill and yet write powerfully when what we write about is greatness, but to be competent and brilliant in writing and yet lack the knowledge of what is great is to use our skill on something which does not much matter.

Let us be clear—there is writing which is professional, by which we earn a living, which in one way or another is journalism. All writing is communication, whether we realize that or not. To be a reporter, a freelance or employed journalist, a news-writer, a scriptwriter are forms of professional writing. It is surely legitimate for us to operate in these forms of the writing media, and to earn our living. The same goes for any other trade or profession. Our contribution is needed in society and so we work in whatever vocation is ours. We said that all writing is communication, but it would be better to say that all living is communicating. Doubtless, as Christians, we will have certain ethics by which we write, as in any vocation we ought to have certain appropriate standards.

In what we call 'hack' writing there may not often be the opportunity to develop greatness of thought. For example, if we are in the business of writing advertising material there may be little scope for other than being efficient and honest. If our writing is for entertainment, then we have to decide the levels of entertainment which we seek to meet. There can be entertainment with greatness, or entertainment that is at a lower level. Great art is really great entertainment: there can be no doubt about that, for great minds appreciate it. Great writing is not necessarily created by inserting some moralistic matter, or even from writing about religion. Religious writing can be as trite as any other kind of scribbling. By the same token there can be religious entertainment of many sorts, and none of it may necessarily have to do with God or with human faith.

Greatness in writing comes from the subject matter, the understanding of the subject matter, and the way of dealing with it, so that it is well communicated. To do this is to serve others, is to give something to the human race—something which will help and enrich it. If the aim of our writing is fame, then we have introduced an element which will speak against what we write. Baruch the scribe of Jeremiah was told, 'And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not.' Milton said, 'Fame is the spur that the proud spirit does raise (that last infirmity of noble minds), to spurn delights and live laborious days.' We will work hard when spurred on by the goal of fame. To have an ambition to communicate well is another matter, provided it does not become an end in itself.

It has been said many times that 'art for arts sake' is a pointless exercise. Art which is an end in itself is simply a skill for its own sake, and for the pleasure of the artist, and perhaps his coterie of admirers. All art should be in the service of others. The writer sees something which is wonderful and enriching, or confronting and demanding, and the very communication of it will add not only to the already existing treasury of truth and beauty, but will speak directly to those who are willing to accept what is being said, and thereby be enriched.

## **THE SUBJECT MATTER OF GREAT WRITING**

The writer must intimately relate to his subject matter, no matter what it is, so that if his writing is to be great, then so must his subject-matter. Whilst he may be competent to take almost anything and write about it in the form which is most appropriate, yet the result may not be greatness. Most of the great writers and artists have had a sense of call, although many of them would not say it was a call of God. Of course many did—and do—believe that in the ultimate the call comes from God, although their relationship with God might not be personal, intimate, moral, or dependent. Often writers and other artists will suffer poverty in order to fulfil their vocation. If ambition to be famous is present then what the person desires to communicate may be limited to some degree. Integrity of one's person is essential to all true art.

What is the subject matter, then, that is great? The answer must be 'God, creation and man'. There is nothing more. This covers all that is eternal and all that is temporal, all that is celestial and all that is terrestrial, all that is seen and all that is unseen. The unseen is not that which does not exist, nor does that which is seen exist in isolation from what is unseen. Hebrews 11:3 says, 'By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear'. We scarcely know what we are saying when we talk of 'the things which do not appear'. The N.E.B. has 'the visible came forth from the invisible', whilst N.I.V. has 'what is seen was not made out of what was visible'. Whatever the meaning, we are convinced that much that is unseen is real. So Moses 'endured as seeing him who is invisible', and Paul spoke of looking to 'the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.' Unseen, then is not unreal. We repeat that great subject matter is 'God, creation and man'.

This canvas of which we speak is so vast as to transcend all that is on the seen horizontal plane of our human living. If there is such a thing as horizontal living then it must be confined, limited, flat and mediocre. There is no such thing essentially as 'horizontal living'. The horizontal can only be understood with the vertical dimension, and likewise the vertical can only be truly understood in the light of the horizontal. One of the right things about art is that it keeps communicating to us the great subject matter of sight and thinking. For example, the Scriptures say that creation beats out the message of God and His nature. It may not be the theologian who sees or hears that message. Any artist may catch the voice of creation, whether it be through the inanimate world, the creaturely world, or the unseen world. The terms 'inanimate', 'creaturely' and 'unseen' are only aspects or elements of the entire creation, for there is only one world, one creation.

## **THE GREATNESS OF THE SUBJECT MATTER**

Writing by Christians can be rich since the believer has the biblical system in his mind. By 'system' we mean that he sees all things through God's revelation. If we can talk about theology—the word concerning God; anthropology—the word concerning man; and cosmology—the word concerning the universe, then the believer has these three as one and

therefore has knowledge and insights beyond those who do not wish to know God. If he understands the history of creation and man—especially the Fall and sinfulness of man—then he has a key of knowledge. When he knows the nature of God as He has revealed Himself by creation, by covenant, and by redemption, then he can see man as he now is—depraved, and yet still in the image of God with all the conflict these two elements evoke. He can understand man as lost, man in existential anguish, man as alienated, lonely, guilty and apprehensive, and then man with his dreams, aspirations, longings for glory, for meaning in life—and so on. If the Christian person is a writer—and artist of a certain kind—then he/she has much to say, i.e. much to give. It is interesting to note that the artist or writer who is not a person of faith will communicate what he sees of ‘man as lost, man in existential anguish, man as alienated, lonely, guilty and apprehensive, and then man with his dreams, aspirations, longings for glory, for meaning in life—and so on’. It may be true art by which he communicates, and will strike rich and responsive notes in like persons—i.e. persons of no faith—but it will not have the wisdom which comes from faith, nor will it liberate the viewer of that art.

The advantage a Christian should have is that he/she has no need to venture into the realm of heavy satire, sarcasm, disillusionment, bitterness, despair, cynicism, anger, nihilism and anarchy. Much writing touches angry humans by confirming and increasing their views of the hopelessness of man and creation—let alone their view of God Who seems uncaring, or unable to do anything. One of the stances of certain writers is that all that is wretched about the human scene has come about because of the selfishness, evil or stupidity of others. Doubtless irony—properly used—is a potent weapon, and showing the absurdity of much that is about us can be most useful. It is when irony and satire become cruel, that the satirist and ironic writer go down a path which will end in misery for all. Understanding love, the richness of the human spirit when united to God, and the healing and renewal that lies in the Father, can bring themes of greatness through the creative writer to humanity in despair, or hopelessness.

Some of the most powerful writing today is that which shocks. There are blockbuster novels which deal with rape, mayhem, murder, violence of the most extreme kinds, treachery, and genocide. One of the problems with this kind of writing is that the degree of violence and shock has to be continually compounded. Sexual experimentation—especially involving cruelty and sadism—has to be depicted in ever-increasing harshness and hardness of operation. Whilst violence and increasing immorality may heighten the adrenalin levels, yet the mind demands an increasing intensity of this kind of action, so that the normal sensitivity becomes calloused, and true feeling is debased—dehumanized. The high views of human relationships are utterly lost in the cynicism of the disappointed. The private intimacy of genuine love intercourse is mocked and shattered by the orgiastic ‘realism’ of blatant and insensitive portrayals. In none of this is there true art. We can even read volumes which raise our hopes of good thinking, good writing, and excellent plot, only to have the writer include selected sections of soft or hard pornography to hold the reader to his book, in which case the work can be said to be ‘spiced’. Many a volume would have read well without these calculated insertions.

By contrast, the Christian who writes can portray the great themes of human living, human existence and human hope with rich effect. He, too, can look at the failure of man in relationships, his angers, hurts, violence and the like, and interpret human living in ways which can show the goodness that is in creation. This leads us on to realize that the grand themes of God as Creator, Father and Redeemer can meet the essential needs of the human mind and spirit. If we realize that all creation is functional, and that deviation from the functional (the true way of living) brings existential pain and awryness to the human spirit—with its attendant burden of guilt—then the greatness of writing will lie in showing the love and forgiveness of God, and the regeneration that they bring. Thus the great human themes of love, courtship, marriage can be shown in their greatness, whilst the tragedies in these areas through sexual deviation, failure

in love, break-up of relationships, shattering of families, and the anger, resentment and violence that attend them, can be treated with the greatness of wisdom. Likewise the hopelessness of humanity without God and without the ultimate goals set for man, can also be revealed without bitterness, and tackled appropriately with true and healing wisdom.

Most modern writing deals with the apparent emptiness of life, to the point of cynicism, and a developed nihilism. The term 'love' still figures with many—note the art of rock and pop music, soul music and the like which offer some hope via human love, especially what is called 'sex'. Titillation of the senses is not great art or pornography would be great art, but showing the greatness of man-woman relationships should be true art. The writer who is a Christian does not have the burden of guilt over him/her, and so can come to the elements of human experience and human destiny without the distortion of them which guilt brings. This means there need be no 'hidden agendas'. We are free to communicate things as they are. We do not have to justify ourselves by succeeding. We are simply free to write without prejudice or ambition. It is that very freedom by which we write, and by which we communicate, and it is the prime then of our art. To know and tell it is the witness to the truth, to God Who has liberated us, and given us the delight of enjoying His creation.

# *Study One: God Communicating with Man-I*

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT OF COMMUNICATION**

In the Shorter Oxford Dictionary the word 'communication' is described as '[1] The action of communicating. Now rare of material things. [2] spec. Imparting, conveying or exchange of ideas, knowledge, etc. (whether by speech, writing, or signs) 1690.[3] concr. That which is communicated as a letter, or its contents. [4] Interchange of speech-1605. [5] Converse, intercourse 1580. [6] Access or means of access between two or more persons or places; passage 1771. [7] The Holy Communion; its observance (rare) 1610. [8] Rhet. a Figure in which a speaker assumes his hearer as a partner in his sentiments, and says We, instead of I or ye 1553.'

Summed up it would seem that the various meanings of the word 'communication' add up to the issuing of ideas or messages from one person which are—ideally—received by another or others hearing or seeing what it is intended should be received. In practice the material of communication may be issued but not always received, either because of prevailing conditions that are not helpful—conditions which may relate to the communicator, or to the watcher-listener or local circumstances. In other words what a communicator sets out to communicate may or may not be received. Ideally, communication properly exists when communicator and recipient are at one.

### **GOD THE COMMUNICATOR**

It is an axiom of the Scriptures that God is always communicating. He communicates Himself: He communicates His truth and His will. He communicates what is necessary for man to know. Whilst sometimes God is described as One Who hides Himself (Ps. 104:29; Isa. 54:8; 57:17) even this self-concealment is part of the way He communicates, e.g. communicates His anger and judgement. Without this communication man cannot properly know Him. We know that He describes Himself as ineffable, i.e. no one can—of himself—know Him because it is impossible to liken Him to anything which is in the universe (Isa. 40:18; 44:7). He is far beyond anything man knows, and He is inscrutable, for man's thinking is not on the level of what is God's 'thinking' (Isa. 55:8–9).

For the moment we will not deal with man's ability—or otherwise—to know God, and concentrate on the fact that God constantly communicates Himself whatever. Of course we will have to keep in mind the matter that man does not want to know God.

### **GOD'S VARIOUS MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION**

Before we look at these media let us examine the purpose of their use. In our present studies we can see that since God uses media to communicate we can rest in the fact of their operations, i.e. can assure ourselves that God has not left it to us to communicate Him. He is communicating—whatever. If it is possible for us to align ourselves with these media, then we

can be in the business of communication. For example, if God speaks by His word—the Scriptures—then we can align ourselves with this communication. Let us then, look at God's media.

### **(i) Creation**

Romans 1:19–20 and Psalm 19:1–4 tell us the message of God is given out through creation. Genesis 1:31; I Timothy 4:4; Psalm 104:24; Jeremiah 10:12 and Ecclesiastes 3:11 assure us that the creation is good and functional, and that everything has been created in wisdom. Man is part of this creation, and is 'the image and glory of God', hence he also communicated God, Who is 'a faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19).

### **(ii) The Word of God**

The word of God is what God speaks. There is His creative word, i.e. He spoke and all things were created (Ps. 33:6; 148:5–6; Heb. 1:1–3; John 1:1–3). There is His sustaining word (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; cf. Ps. 89:36–37; Jer. 31:36–37). There is His prophetic word (see below), there is His enacted word—He does what He says He will do, and what He says comes to pass. There is the word of law by which He shows His righteousness, the word of grace or redemption (Acts 10:37; 13:43; 20:24, 32) by which He saves man, the word of sanctification by which He purifies man (John 15:3; 17:17) and there is the eschatological word—the word referring to the last times which is linked with the prophetic word. The word of God also comes through dreams and visions, as through theophanies—angelic visitations showing God's glory and His intentions.

We need to enlarge on the media for the utterance of the word, but first we must realize there is no word of God apart from God or which can be separated from Him. God's word is always directly spoken into the human situation as promise, command, judgement, salvation, exhortation—and the like. Note that what God has spoken in the past has also been given to us for meditation, e.g. Psalm 1:1–3. In this sense all the Scriptures are the word of God, and speak to us today.

### **(iii) Theophanies**

Theophanies are 'manifestations of God', i.e. appearances to man under certain guises or expressions. Acts 7:2 says the God of glory appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia. He appeared to him in many forms, even human forms. He appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and then in the glory cloud on Sinai. The glory-cloud or 'Presence-cloud' (Shekinah) is often spoken of in Scripture—on Sinai, in leading Israel, in prophecy (e.g. Isaiah, Ezekiel), at the birth and transfiguration of Christ, and in the Book of the Revelation. Theophanies always brought the word from God. Generally theophanies were by visitation of angels. The subject of angels is a vast one in both the Old and New Testaments. The highest form of theophany was the appearance of the Angel of the Lord, who was also called 'the angel of His presence'. Some believe he was—is—the Son of God. Theophanies, angels and the glory all bring the word of God.

### **(iv) Prophecy**

Prophecy was—is—the voice of God speaking to man through the prophet (cf. Exod. 6:30–7:2). Sometimes God gave the prophet the word 'face to face' but usually through dreams and visions often known as 'dark speech' (Num. 12:6–7; Deut. 13:1–5; 18:9–22; Jer. 23:23ff.). Acts 2:17–

20/Joel. 2:28–32 show that prophecy came by dreams and visions in the New Testament, even though there was the charisma of prophecy. Prophecy is concerned with 'the testimony of Jesus' (Rev. 19:10). Apart from Christ Himself prophecy has always been God's most direct form of speech, of His word (Heb. 1:1–2), and so has been the most dynamic.

#### **(v) Covenant and Law**

The two should never be thought of apart from each other, any more than the two should be thought of apart from God, because if they are detached they will be seen in a wrong light. Covenant is God's way of speaking to sinful man and bringing him to fellowship with Himself, showing His redemptive nature to man. Covenant-Law is God's way of living given to covenant man. Law tells the nature of God, informs of righteousness, and teaches the functional way of living, and obedience to it brings maturation of the person. Conscience is a faculty of man to which and through which God speaks by Creation Law and Covenant-Law and when man is redeemed he can clearly hear the voice (word) of God.

*Note: When we speak of these various media we must not think that God is locked into them, or limited to the ones we mention. They are the media He devises and uses, so that He is always speaking to man, though man does not desire to hear him. It is interesting also to realize that the Scriptures tell us of these media. We would not otherwise know that they are media.*

#### **(vi) The Names of God**

God's names are all revelations of Himself. A study of these shows various revelations of His nature, the primary one being I AM or I AM WHO I AM.

#### **(vii) The Acts of God**

The term 'Living God' means He is always acting, and His acts are History as it really is. Acts—beyond all other things—indicate the nature of the doer. In this way God speaks, for He never ceases to act.

#### **(viii) The Son of God.**

Hebrews 1:1–2 makes it clear that Christ was/is the Son incarnate. God has spoken to us by His Son, Immanuel, God with us. He is the true communicator—'the visible expression of the invisible God', 'the word of God'. Who has seen him has seen the Father, since no one comes to the Father apart from him.

#### **(ix) The Holy Spirit and the People of God**

The Holy Spirit is God's Agent in creation, covenant, prophecy, redemption, regeneration and restoration. Because he is the Spirit of truth he alone can reveal the truth, convict of the truth, and lead into the truth (John 16:12–15; 7–11; I John 5:7). He is the one who assists the church to proclaim the truth (Acts 1:8; I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess. 1:5). The church itself is a marvellous unit of medium.

## **CONCLUSION AS TO GOD'S MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION**

Through the above media God is incessantly communicating Himself, though often to deaf ears—ears that deliberately will not listen. Since we wish to communicate—as God bids us—we must understand why many human beings will not listen. We conclude that no one can rightly accuse God of not communicating. Every human being has a moral responsibility to have an 'ear to hear'. As we will now see, hearing is a matter of the will, not of ability.

## *Study Two: God Communicating with Man-II*

### **THE HEARING AND THE NON-HEARING**

A reading of Scripture makes it clear to us that the truth of God is not always heard. In fact it seems that the majority of the human race seems not to hear the voice of God. In spite of the constant operation of the media we have described in our last study comparatively little seems to have filtered through to the human race. The nation of Israel seems also to have been largely in this state. It seemed to hear the religious and political voices of the idols and gods rather than the word of God. The first couple preferred the word of the serpent to God's word. The prophetic 'thus says the Lord' was largely rejected, although it must have been powerful since it provoked the hearers to murder almost all the prophets.

In the New Testament Jesus constantly cries, 'He who has an ear to hear, let him hear!' The Gospels show us that people listened to Jesus but did not hear what he said, or they misheard what he said or they misinterpreted what he said, this showing their attitude of mind towards him. This is, of course, universally the case wherever there are speakers and hearers. We hear what we wish to hear, mishear as we feel the need, and misinterpret because we are bound to do so. There may well be cases which do not fit into this pattern, but they will be rare.

### **REASONS FOR HEARING AND NON-HEARING**

We noted in our last study that created man heard God before the Fall. Since then he does not wish to hear Him (Rom. 1:21–28), and what God has created he has changed into a new format in his thinking, i.e. 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie'. This means that everything he sees is not as it really is. Nothing is ontological, i.e. in its essential form. In fact nothing can change from its essential ontological reality, but it has changed in man's mind. This results in tremendous confusion. Denying reality, man makes his own 'realities'. There is a variety of 'realities'. These so-called realities are in some ways connected with the cultures man has devised or evolved. Since most folk are greatly conditioned by their cultures and culture-religions, then it might seem an impossible task to bring through the truth to them.

Paul described what happened to man when he rebelled against God. In Romans 1:21 he said, 'For although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.....they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.' In another place he said, 'They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them.' What Paul did not mean was that man lost his intellectual powers, but that he used—and uses—them wrongly. His thinking may be brilliant, logical and greatly productive but the thinking has a bias towards man, and not towards God. He sees things as he wills to see them.

Not all men and women think alike, therefore the variety of cultures, philosophies, ideologies and religions is vast. This gives a man great choice. He can leave the choice of God at the end of the line—if ever he should reach that terminus! The fact is that knowledge of God can only come out of a relationship with Him, i.e. knowledge of God is relational. Refuse the relationship and you refuse the knowledge you could otherwise have.

### **KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS RELATIONAL**

When God wanted a person to do His will (Acts 7:2) or be His prophet He first took them into Himself before sending them out (Isa. 6:1–10; Gal. 1:16). Christ did this with his disciples. To know God is life eternal (John 17:3; I John 5:20). Life eternal is relationship with God. God first forgives, purifies, justifies and sanctifies a person, and then He sends him/her out. If man were to know God he would know He is love (I John 4:7–8) and so he would love. The wisdom of this world is a proud self-saving wisdom, pitted against God and so self-seeking (cf. I Cor. 1:19–25).

God in Christ has removed the barrier between Himself and man, i.e. sin (Isa. 59:2). By the work of the Cross He has achieved reconciliation between Himself and man, and between man and his fellow-man (Col. 1:19–22). Man can now have relationships with God so as to know Him (Jer. 9:23–24). He can also have mutual relationships with others. Thus true knowledge and true wisdom come to him. The relationships within which man once knew God were 'Creator to creature, King to subject, Father to son'. These relationships were/are dynamic, effecting true knowledge of God. Sin disrelates (Isa. 59:2; Hosea 4:1–6), and reconciliation re-relates (Hosea 5:15–6:3).

True knowledge of God—and so of man—comes through Christ who is God's wisdom for us in righteousness, sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30). In him 'are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2:3; cf. 1:19; 2:9). Knowing God brings us back to what we were and truly are, and true knowledge—relational—comes to us. We know who and what we are because we know God and His will, His plan for history and its climax. This is true knowledge.

### **THE IMPEDIMENTS TO KNOWLEDGE**

Jeremiah 9:23–24 is a fascinating statement, ending up with 'let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practise steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight'. Not to want to know God cuts off man from true knowledge.

The first thing in seeking to communicate the truth is to realize that it will not be wanted. If we realize that, then we will not be frustrated and terribly disappointed when people do not hear us or choose to mishear and misinterpret what we say. The second element to realize is that man has already thought out his patterns of belief and action, and does not wish to be confronted with God's word, which differs. The third fact is that there is no fool-proof way of communication. We can have the best skills and media for communicating but may well fail. Fourthly we need to see that we have creation—ontology—on our side. Stubborn rebellious man is fighting his own deeper inner knowledge—he is seeking to suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18), which he would not have to do if it were not the truth! He is the one on the defensive. We conclude that argumentation—as such—will not convince him, though discussion may prove useful. Debate may even dam up his dynamic and give him a stronger defiance and effect further resistance.

Our next study will be about the battle for communication itself, the key to which is immediacy. That is, we can only communicate what is true and immediate to us, and we need to communicate it with immediacy—'Straight from producer to consumer, with no intermediary'. This is what we will need to know. Meanwhile we should be confident that we have the solution to man's dilemma as he is out of fellowship with God, but can come to reconciliation with Him through His Son, find forgiveness and peace, and so come into true full (relational) knowledge of God.

### **THE DIRECT IMPACT OF THE TWO-EDGED SWORD THAT GOES OUT FROM CHRIST'S MOUTH**

This sword referred to in Revelation 1:16; 2:12; 19:15 (cf. Isa. 11:4; II Thess. 2:8) is called the 'sword of the Spirit' in Ephesians 6:17. It is the word of God which will smite the nations. This does not just mean 'the Bible', for Christ speaks his own word into creation, into sustaining creation, and into defeating the nations and the powers of darkness. It is however consistent with the Bible, and in the ethos of it. That word—the Spirit's sword, as also the sword of Christ—is the truly powerful communication that strikes against the falsehood of the worldly word. In the long run, ideas are more powerful than actions, for they are that which brings about action. An example of this is the writings of Marx. The impact of these has been enormous in this century, yet already they are being seen to be false prophecy. What is not true will not cut forever! What does not have innate power—ontologically—will ultimately fail. The following quotes should be of great help in seeing they communicate the eternal gospel.

Divine revelation is more than the disclosure of supranatural knowledge concerning the nature and purposes of God (R. H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, p. 151).

Revelation is the self-bestowal of the living God.....God in the act of imparting Himself (P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 10).

.....we are now more aware that it is God Himself Who speaks in the proclamation. Preaching is not talking about God. It is allowing God to talk. The words of the preacher are simply the medium through which the Divine Word comes. It is God who speaks (Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 154).

Preaching is the immediate, powerful, personal self-communication of the eternal Word to men (C. K. Barrett, *Biblical Preaching and Biblical Scholarship*, p. 4).

Preaching has a single purpose, that Christ might come to those who are assembled to listen (Gustaf Wingren, *Predikan; en principiell studie*, p. 296, cited by Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 154).

As the preacher proclaims the divine act of redemption, the barriers of time are somewhat transcended and that supreme event of the past is again taking place. God's historic self-disclosure has become a present reality (Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 153).

Preaching does more than recount and explain the ancient event. The Spirit makes the ancient event in a very real sense an event now transpiring, and the preaching is a medium of the Spirit's action in doing so. In the preaching, when it is truly itself, the event is continuing or is recurring. God's revealing action in Christ is, still or again, actually taking place (John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching*, p. 92, cited in Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 153).

Preaching is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself (P. T. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 3).

Only authentically biblical preaching can be really relevant; only vitally relevant preaching can be really biblical (John Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 27).

.....there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot (Jeremiah, 20:9).

.....you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (Paul, I Thess. 2:13).

## *Study Three: Competition in Communications*

### **EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE COMMUNICATING**

What we know is that everyone is in the matter of communications. Husbands and wives communicate—whether they wish to or not! So do children and parents, friends and enemies. We all communicate, but do not view it as a business. Others do. Advertisers are out to capture their readers, listeners and viewers. Political parties seek to win the minds of the electorate. Social clubs, sporting groups and churches wish to influence people for their own advancement. One of the latest facilities is 'Rent-a-Crowd'! Artists, writers and musicians many times are found offering their wares, although not always. Most of these 'persuaders' are reasonably mild. They aim to communicate directly and reap quick results. More formidable are the forces which aim to change the minds of persons, and capture them psychologically, religiously and ideologically. Every person ought to read William Sargent's *Battle For The Mind* (Pan Books, London, 1959), if only to see the powerful techniques used to induce changes in the thinking of devotees of sects and ideologies. The famous method of brain-washing through induced abreaction, i.e. the technique of building up fear in the mind by heavy emotion and guilt until the mind rejects its past by a psychological catharsis, thus laying itself open to the inrush of a new suggested scheme of thinking and action.

The techniques of manipulating the human mind are ancient. In Sargent's book there is a long article written by Robert Graves on the ancient Greek rites by which devotees were 'born again'. Whilst they were mostly horrific, they were certainly dynamic. Sargent sees parallels in many of the religious sects of today. William Kilpatrick in his book *Psychological Seduction* (Thomas Nelson, 1983) shows that re-birthing rituals are part of almost every culture. Whatever may be the interpretations of mind-changing rituals, the fact is that we live in an age when propaganda is exercised in world-wide proportions. Some countries have a Minister of Propaganda. The diplomatic and spying networks of countries are vast and intricate. Misinformation is also utilized to effect misleading knowledge to the human mind.

Biblically this is nothing new. We have touched on the Satanic system and the so-called 'wisdom' of this world. Without allowing ourselves to be intimidated by the idea of an horrific conspiracy, we ought to recognize that the powers of darkness seek to blind human eyes 'to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ' (II Cor. 4:4), and that the word 'deceptive' is applied to sin, human beings, human lusts, the world and the devil. The devil is the one 'who goes out to deceive the whole world' and 'to deceive the nations'. J.B. Phillips translates Ephesians 6:10–12, 'Put on God's complete armour so that you can successfully resist all the devil's methods of attack. For, as I expect you have learned by now, our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organizations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.' Paul was saying that every day and in every way there are

communications that emanate from 'the very headquarters of evil'. This is doubtless why he tells the Christians at Rome, 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.' He does so because just as subliminal advertising can powerfully affect human thinking without the object of it being consciously aware, so evil emanations can deeply affect us. We need an initial change of mind—i.e. repentance (the Greek word *metanoia* means 'change of mind')—and then a constant process, daily, of renewal of the mind. This is effected by reading and obeying the word of God, however it may come to us.

We conclude then, that everyone and everything is seeking to grip the human mind and condition human thinking and action. As Christians we need to know the world in which we live, and what are the commands to preach the Gospel to it, as well as to know what it is to be light and salt within it.

What we need to realize is that all that is evil—Satan, his world-system and human beings—are not only drawn on by unholy ambition, but are compulsively driven to prove, vindicate and justify themselves and their systems. If we miss the reality of this drive and the enormous compulsion of it, we will fail to realize why people do not hear our communications properly. We communicate in fact, but what we say is threatening to survival of the others, and is violently rejected, or passively ignored.

## **KNOWING THE WORLD TO WHICH, AND IN WHICH WE COMMUNICATE**

Two things we must know, (i) what we wish to communicate; and (ii) the world in which we live and in which we wish to communicate the truth. We need a biblical exposition of these two things or we will be confused.

### **What We Communicate**

As for what we communicate—that is God who is the truth, and His saving elements which redeem man, bringing him back to God and assuring him of true life in this world, and of even more wonderful life in the world to come—we must know it properly. Undoubtedly we need to comprehend 'the whole counsel of God', much of which can be learned via reading of the Scriptures, use of aids such as bible dictionaries, bible commentaries and theological works. (I suggest two of my own books, *The Things We Firmly Believe* (NCPI, 1981) and *Salvation History* (NCPI, n.d.).

What we communicate must not simply be what we teach because we have been indoctrinated and conditioned to believe it. Nor must it simply be to gain devotees or proselytes to our group situation. It must not even be the best amongst a number of options. It must be truth of God.

### **The World to Which, and in Which We Communicate**

Christians are often confused over the use of the term 'the world'. It is better for us to use the word primarily for the whole creation, but with special reference to our own planet. Secondly there is the use of it to cover the system under Satan—'the prince (or, god) of this world'—which includes fallen celestial and terrestrial creatures, and is organized against God and for Satan, that he might attain to his unholy ambition of ruling the creation (see *The Dominion of Darkness and the Victory of God* NCPI, 1977).

What we must first understand is that this world is God's and not Satan's. Christians need never think that Satan controls the creation: it is God's alone. Nothing created is evil of itself

(Gen. 1:31; Eccles. 3:11; Rom.14:14; I Tim. 4:4). Without doubt Satan and his powers were originally given authority—their names 'principalities', 'authorities', 'dominions'—testify to this, and they refuse to let these go, choosing to use them for evil purposes. It is also clear from the Scriptures that God allows them to work their will in many ways so that some sicknesses are linked with them, as also demonic possession, oppression and manipulation of persons and nations. Even so, Christians should not be apprehensive or frightened. God is in control and all authority has been given to Christ who is Lord over all. In fact God, in Christ, can be said to have re-won the creation by the Incarnation and the Atonement. Not that—in one sense—it was ever lost, but God's reign over it all was established irreversibly by the victory of the Cross.

Further, we should see that evil forces work in the good creation of God, insinuating that things such as food, comfort, sex, and pleasure are evil, when in fact they have been given for man's enjoyment (cf. I Cor. 10:26; I Tim. 4:1–4; 6:17; I Cor. 10:31). These powers seek to control the action of history, especially of nations. The Book of the Revelation—especially chapters 12 to 20—sets out the following forces:

(i) The dragon who is in fact 'that ancient serpent, the devil, who goes out to deceive the whole world'.

(ii) Clones of the dragon, namely the first and second beasts. The first beast is a copy of the dragon, the second beast is 'like a lamb', whilst the 'image' and the 'false prophet' seem to be one and the same.

(iii) The city called 'Babylon, the mother of harlots', the city with whom the kings and merchants of the world do trade.

We do not say that these evil powers are literally as they are depicted because the language is apocalyptic, having strong symbolic presentation, but behind these figures are the realities of beastly and false and seductive powers. We do not think a hideous dragon or beast is lumbering about, spatially, but we do believe that what these pictures symbolize is actual and terrible. At the same time, none of these figures operates as seen and dreadful creatures. Many interesting interpretations of them and their actions can be read, but our reading should help us to see that what is draconian, beastly, deceptive, attractive but deceptive and evilly seductive, is abroad in our world. Because humans are sensual and proud creatures the communications which come from these forces are most powerful. In one sense the forces of holiness and love stand little chance against them. Their ambition is to destroy all the forces of God, and to enslave all His creatures, conscripting them for their purposes.

One example of their operations is 'the mark of the beast', the number 666. Many interpreters have sought to give us true understanding but cannot do so satisfactorily. It can only be known by contrast to 'the seal of God'. Those with the beast's mark are sealed for evil, and those with God's mark are sealed for Him. The beast is said to triumph for a time, and the dragon, the beast and the false prophet to be able to deceive the kings and leaders of nations so that they set out to destroy even God.

## **THIS WORLD IS GOD'S**

Our seeming diversion above—regarding evil powers and the world system—may seem to be out of our subject of communications. To the contrary: it is very much to do with it. We will have to understand that the human race is torn between the devil and the deep blue sea! Communication is not a joke or an idle option. It is deadly business. If we could easily distinguish 'worldly' and 'Christian' communications then our task might be easier, but that distinction is difficult to make. Deception, seduction, coercion and threatening are the tools-in-

trade of the worldly powers. We cannot 'take a leaf out of their books' or cleverly match them—as it were—act for act. Essential to true action is the understanding that this world is God's. He is Sovereign. Despite seeming appearances to the contrary He is King over all. The Scriptures freely admit that the world will seem to swamp mankind and history and appear to be the most powerful force, but tells us that in the end all evil will collapse, and every knee bow to Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of the Father. The kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ and as His people we shall reign for ever—'a kingdom of priests unto our God'.

That this world is God's is greatly important. True believers are not strangers in this creation, though they may be very much strangers to the ways of the Satanic world-system and do not feel at home in it. In our next study we will see that 'worldlings', too, are not at home in the world-system. Indeed they are much in anguish within it. They are still confronted by the word of God, i.e. by God talking to them through many media which they cannot cut off. The central prophecy of Scripture is that the sword of the Spirit—the sharp two-edged sword which issues out of Christ's mouth—will 'smite the nations'. The sword is the word of God and all believers should take heart and become part of this action of the sword—i.e. of the final and dynamic communication.

## *Study Four: Communicating in Today's World-I*

### **'ECCLESIASTES' AND THE HUMAN DILEMMA**

The Book of Ecclesiastes is probably the most popular—and most quoted—book of the Bible outside the group of those who read the Scriptures as people of faith. It seems to be a book in which worldly disillusionment and hard-headed pessimism are presented. The writer of the book is called 'Ecclesiastes' in Greek and 'Kohleth' in Hebrew, meaning 'The Preacher' in English. We need not here discuss who he was, but he was a preacher with considerable experience of life and probably had had more variety of human living than of his audience.

His thesis is that nothing 'under the sun', i.e. 'under heaven', or 'upon the earth' has any substantial value or purpose. No matter what man does—either in deliberately sensual living, or high and lofty ambition—will ever come to anything. Everything is 'vanity', i.e. 'a striving after wind'. It is pointless, fruitless, windy and empty. If, however, one fears God and keeps His commandments then the whole world of living is different. One can not only enjoy this world, but one is commanded to do so.

If one looks for the explanation of life by experiment, by the writing and reading of many theses, then one will fail to understand it. By saying this Kohleth virtually destroys all the religious and philosophic thinking man has achieved in his history. When we use the word 'destroys' we do not mean there is no value in all that philosophers or religionists have thought, but we mean it is only of relative value, unless, of course it is at one with the word of God. This insight is extremely valuable for our matter of communications. Going down the track criticized by Kohleth leads us nowhere. The interpretation of the book is, then, as follows,

We can live as flat-earththers, i.e. be occupied in everything—and anything—that is 'under the sun'. This is 'horizontal' living. It has nothing of transcendence about it. Ultimately every one living this way will find it pointless and purposeless. There may be clever people who will develop an 'ontology of the horizontal' but it will not stand up to the living of life, for it will produce nothing. If we were to live in a purely 'vertical' way we would be 'out of this world' and not properly in it. Kohleth speaks of those as 'righteous overmuch' and 'overwise'—but to no point. If we see all that is horizontal in the light of the vertical, and the vertical in the light of the horizontal, then that will be reality and life, and in fact, life most enjoyable.

This insight of Kohleth is most valuable for us. When we see 'horizontal man' and realize he can never be satisfied since 'God has put eternity in his heart so that he cannot find out the end from the beginning', then we will realize that because man is never satisfied with the horizontal, he is driven to devise an explanation and a purpose for the horizontal, only to find there is none! It is to this unsatisfied and frustrated humanity that we can speak of 'the light of life' and 'life that is abundant'. To the one who thinks that death offers nothing, salvation and eternal life can become living issues, and the way out of his dilemma.

What we are saying is something we said before, i.e. 'the ontological is on our side.' The deceptions of evil do not bring true satisfaction, by nature of the case. Human radar towards God may be 'out of focus' but it still forces man to seek out what corresponds to God—if indeed, there can be such! We mean that when it is said, 'Men are women are looking for something', then we have to agree but the something is not necessarily God. It would have to be some substitute for Him, something to fill up 'God-shaped blank' in man.

### **LIVING IN THE WORLD OF ART AND CULTURE**

We now come to the heart of our subject of communications. Given man's loneliness when he is apart from the Presence of God, and even has to live with the (seeming) Absence of the Presence, and lives in dread that the Absence might at any moment become the Presence, we see that man cannot entirely cut himself off from the truth. Since God has 'put eternity into his heart' he is forced to investigate 'the end from the beginning'. The way in which he derives a certain satisfaction and some sense of the transcendent is through art and culture. These lift him from the dreariness of 'horizontal' living and tell him of things different, perhaps things beautiful, but certainly things which release him from perpetual boredom. That man can occupy himself with art and culture is axiomatic. He has the ability to paint, sculpture, compose song and music, create dances and drama, and write in the forms of poetry, stories, novels, biography and history, and—what is more—man generally can enjoy the what the artist has brought into sensible being.

### **ORIGINS OF ART AND CULTURE**

By the word 'art' we include all that we have just described in our last paragraph. By 'culture' we mean the mores and manners of any societal group. Since our study is not strictly an anthropological one, but more a theological one, we will content ourselves with saying that we can trace tribes and peoples back to certain beginnings. It seems that it was—and is—always innate in man to communicate his thoughts and experiences by means of art, and for these to be outworked in culture. Culture must be something which develops and evolves, and perhaps for certain reasons also retrogresses and even dies.

Biblically we see that man's rejection of God led him immediately to idolatry—surrogate deity—and it appears that his culture revolved around his gods. His world-view was linked with these. Cultures in one way were the rationalization of his world view—his ideas of creation, the world about him, life and death and the relationships and environment in which he had to live. Arts as he practised them seem to be abilities and skills which were innate and became developed. Whilst Israel was forbidden to make anything to be worshipped which was in the likeness of anything on earth, in the sea, and the sky, yet the presence of art in the building of the tabernacle and its furniture—let alone the later temples—shows that the arts of painting, sculpting, music and dancing were not forbidden. The Scriptures and other documents are testimony to the fact that poetry, historical and prophetic literature, including the written law, biography and teaching were acceptable. Because God is ineffable all attempts to visibilize Him by art were rejected. That does not mean however that God's voice could not and would not speak through these special media.

### **COMMUNICATING IN AND BY ART AND CULTURE**

Romans 1:21–25 shows that man's rejection of God caused him to make substitutes for God, which to a great degree explains cultures. We have also seen that man can never escape the

ontological, and the word of God that keeps coming through God's various media. It is inevitable then, that universal principles of the truth cannot be wholly ignored, and will tend to assert or produce themselves in various—if not all—cultures. We refrain from trying to prove this point. What we are saying is that not all that is in any culture is necessarily wrong and to be rejected. Generally speaking there is a sense of morality and rejection of certain objectionable practices across most cultures. Some objectionable customs remain in certain societies, but other cultures may counsel abolition of such, e.g. suttee in India and the destruction of twins in certain tribes.

The Christian should not think that all things belonging to any given culture are per se wrong. It is better for him to see himself in a world in which there is vast variety of customs and practices. He can live with most of them with ease—if he will. It is not 'the Gospel versus culture', but 'the Christian in God's creation' that should be at the heart of our thinking. Likewise the Christian should not think of all the arts as belonging to the world, to Satan, and therefore to have an inbuilt evil;. They, in fact, like anything else, can be used for moral or immoral purposes. At the same time the believer should not wish to use them for propaganda or indoctrinating purposes. Rightly used all arts are the vehicles of the word of God, are the means by which communications come to the human race.

What do we mean by this? We say that because God made man in His own image and likeness he must therefore reflect all that God is, and since God is Creator, then he must be creative. The term 'creative' has to be qualified. Only God can create i.e. *creatio ex nihilo*—creation out of nothing, or, at least 'out of the things which do not appear' (Heb. 11:3). No maker of painting, music, sculptures and writing makes things out of nothing. What he creates may seem to come from nowhere, i.e. 'out of the air', but in fact he can only visualize or sculpt or paint from things already known to the mind even if he over-emphasizes, exaggerates, minimizes, changes or fantasizes what he has seen or heard. In this sense we call man a second-degree creator. It is almost impossible to coin another word when we wish to insist that only God is Creator. In one sense the person can be called 'an originator', but what he invented or devised did not wholly arise from himself seeing man cannot be wholly autonomous. The term 'procreative' is possibly the best adjective we can use, i.e. the action of generating something. Since parents did not invent the ability to procreate then creation must be put down to the Creator.

There is a enormous danger of human egotism in the procreative skills of artists, musicians and writers. It is the danger of thinking we are God or gods. That is why use of the arts is fraught with problems. If we could think of God moving artists to generate with their gifts, then we would have to say that the artist moves after God, not prior to, or wholly apart from Him. This could be so even if the person were a militant atheist. On this basis it is then wrong to speak of 'a Christian artist' or 'Christian art'. Undoubtedly art that is linked with the Christian Scriptures may loosely be called 'Christian art', but it could equally be done by a person who is not a Christian, i.e. depictions of God and of events or persons in the Bible, including Jesus. These could be faithful productions of the artist's thinking, but only a person who is a Christian could produce the word of truth through his work.

The term 'word of truth' is relevant to what we are saying. Not every element of truth that comes to us through an artist has to be 'religious' or 'biblical' or 'moral'. An artist may depict in music, painting sculpting, or writing) essential elements of creation which have missed the eyes of the non-artist and even the artist who is a Christian.

## *Study Five: Communicating in Today's World-II*

### **THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATOR**

There is of course no such thing as a Christian communicator. There is just a Christian who communicates. All Christians ought to communicate the truth. There are Christians who are painters, sculptors song-writers, composers of music, composers of dances and dramas, and writers of poems, stories and other literature. Then there are Christians whose actions in life are artistic, communicating wonderful things. For a moment we look at some of the elements which should specially characterize the Christian who seeks to communicate the truth to others. They are as follows,

- (i) **The Christian person is free**, and lives in freedom. When the weight of guilt and separation from God is on a person, certain gifts can be inhibited, or when used communicate the inner bondage. Once freed the gift springs to life and the skill is developed. I have seen many people who having been converted immediately start writing poems, composing songs, writing stories or painting pictures for the first time. Others have their habitual skills suddenly enhanced.
- (ii) **The Christian person knows the truth**. Jesus said that the truth would set them free. To know the truth is to have 'exchanged the lie of Satan and rebellious man for the truth of God'. This means that one's world-view is also changed. One knows God and man and the creation in a fresh and wonderful way. There is something constantly relaxing and liberating about knowing the truth, and having the mind continually renewed in it.
- (iii) **The liberating truth is always for action**. God's revelation of Himself is never just for the luxury of a new life and a different understanding. Whenever and wherever—in the Scriptures—God appeared to man it was for projected action. Man's reason to be man is action. Knowing God is doing His will, and doing His will is the action of true history that moves towards its telos—its destined conclusion.
- (iv) **All true communication is basically prophetic**, that is man is telling society what God has told him and has told him to tell. Whether the communicator is a believer or not he is under God's hand, so many an artist who does not profess faith in God become the channel of communication. It is a fact that most artists think that their vocation is their destiny. It was always intended, and they know they must fulfil it. The Christian, because he is under God's hand, and because he is grateful to God, and is filled with his love has a richer incentive to tell the truth he knows. This does not

maker him a better person or a better artist than one who does not believe, but it certainly makes him 'better off'!

- (v) **The Christian person can be free of egotism if he/she will.** It is not that Christian folk in communication are not sometimes terrible egotists for some of them are, but they have every encouragement to see that their work springs from God and not from themselves. The pop-idols of the music world do not have to be reproduced in the church. The bohemian artist does not have to be part of the community of Christ. Egotism is a contradiction of the truth. Also the Christian communicator as one who is involved in the media does not have to think he is a special person. He can reject the trend of media-folk which is to play to the audience, be an entertainer, and be one who often sacrifices genuine moral standards for the plaudits of his audience. Many media-folk are distinct rebels. The fruit of the Spirit are the most valuable elements in the life of the true communicator. The Christian is not communicating himself but God.

## THE CHRISTIAN PROCLAMATION

It would be strange to do a course on the way to communicate Christian truth and yet not discuss what it is we proclaim. In fact what we proclaim ought to be a presupposition in such a course, but then some persons are simply fascinated by the vocation of communication, or are intrigued and delighted by the apparatus and media of communication such the use of electronic devices, recorders, cameras, props, decor, lighting, musical instruments, written scenarios and the like. It must be said that none of these things communicates of itself, and preoccupation with them may even prevent useful communication. In fact there is nothing to surpass the human body and personality for communication. Its appearance, its use of body language, gestures, expressions of face and eyes, use of limbs and the like are the most marvellous of all media. Electronic apparatus and other devices simply help to extend the personal communication.

What the person communicates is, then, the heart of the matter. We have already said that the Christian—whatever he is, and what he does—needs to know the whole counsel of God. This does not require him to be a brilliant theologian or an expert in doctrine, or even well conversant with the Scriptures, although none of these things should prove a burden to carry. Primarily Christian communication is Christian witness.. Christ told his disciples that they would witness to him (John 15:25–26; Luke 24:47–9; Acts 1:8) and that this witness would be by the Holy Spirit who would (i) bring to their remembrance and understanding all he has said to them, (ii) reveal Christ and the Father to them, including all the things which belonged both the Father and the Son, and (iii) lead them into all the truth, by which truth he—the Spirit—would convict men and women of sin, righteousness and judgement.

The primary message the apostles brought was 'Jesus is Lord!' They meant that although Christ was crucified as a malefactor the proof that he was not evil or mistaken was that he rose from the dead. Thus God attested to him as righteous, and his word to be the truth. God also attested to the judgement of evil. Those who heard the word of the apostles and who confessed Christ's Lordship with their lips, believing in their hearts that it was God who raised him from the dead, were saved.

The word the apostles proclaimed was known as the kerugma or 'the proclamation'. It was this:

- (i) Jesus is the Messiah predicted by the O.T. prophecies. His ministry of teaching, his actions, his death, resurrection and ascension all comport with the prophecies, and affirm him to be Messiah.
- (ii) His death was God's act to deal with sin. His resurrection attested to the effective power of the Cross, and affirmed Jesus as Lord over life, death, creation and all history.
- (iii) Men and women must, therefore, believe his Lordship, believe on him, repent of their sins and receive forgiveness of sins. Those who do this will (a) be forgiven and justified, (b) will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and (c) be incorporated into the new covenant, and the new people of God.

On the surface there may not seem to be much in this kerugma which is exciting but in fact there is everything in it which release man from his dilemma as a rebellious existent in God's true creation. Forgiveness, reconciliation with God, union with Him, being part of His family, having new life, a changed mind, being filled with love, joy and peace, and being assured of eternal life with the promise of glorification and an eternal inheritance are materials enough to keep the artists of every gift and skill busy for the rest of their days. It can be seen, then, that the communicator must understand the whole counsel of God, be gripped by it, and so witness to its reality.

### **THE PRINCIPLE OF IMMEDIACY**

The principle of immediacy is the most important element of all in communication. The article attached to this paper amplifies it (*Immediacy in Life and Communication*, G. Bingham, NCPI Pastors' Group, 3/7/89). The substance of immediacy is that God speaks to His prophet who is the direct agent of His word. The person must live close to God, in God, and God in Him. Only out of that relationship can his communication be real. The apostles said, 'We cannot but tell the things we have seen and heard.' Paul said that God revealed His Son in him—in Paul—that he might preach him among the nations. Only when Christ was internalized in him could Paul speak with immediacy. Christ was the most powerful example of immediacy—he was sent from the Father and only uttered what he had heard from God. He came 'to bear witness to the truth.' Whoever saw him—the Son—immediately saw the Father.

The source of immediacy is the Holy Spirit who reveals Christ to the believer, who anoints the believer with all the truth, and who enables him to proclaim the truth—with the immediacy of witness. The following Scriptures need to be looked at—Acts 1:8; John 16:12–15; I John 5:7; Rev. 1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:11, 17; 19:10). Immediacy prevents a second-hand message, a message which will have been contemplated, thought over, and perhaps so infused with human thinking and—perhaps—corrective reasoning, that it no longer remains as the true proclamation. The true communicator speaks from heart to heart or even from 'gut to gut', since truth is visceral as it is also cerebral. If what the speaker says it not the word become his flesh, then it does not carry conviction and cannot bring true communication.

Communication is the truth which has come to the speaker with immediacy and so is told with immediacy. Immediacy is not something which is transitory. God's indwelling of the believer and his indwelling of God assures constant immediacy in communication. We are not now confining communication to speaking, but seeing it as coming via all the arts, all the gifts of believers, and through the motions and actions of their lives. The old saying is, 'It is better felt than told!'



## *Study Six: Creative Communication*

### **CHRISTIAN CREATIVITY**

There is no such thing as 'art for art's sake'. Art is not an end in itself. With some the means of communication are treated as ends in themselves, as forms of hobby or recreation, means of earning money or attaining recognition and fame. Where the use of these gifts is creative then their use will not be conditioned by utilitarian considerations. What we have to realize is that man being made in the image of God is one with God, and one with what He is doing in His creation. Just as God speaks to man and all creation according to the media we outlined in our first study, so man uses the media God has implanted in him. It is unnatural for him not to do so. The creational mandate of God to man to be fruitful, multiply, fill up the earth and have lordship (stewardship) over it demands the use of all his faculties and gifts.

God is ever-working, ever-acting in His universe, and man—as His image—must also be an actor and a doer. The interdependence of all members of the solidary body of humankind is of great importance. In this lies its active functionality.

Leo Tolstoy—one of Russia's greatest writers and thinkers—wrote a book entitled *What is Art?* (Oxford U.P., 1930), and his description of art is helpful:

We are accustomed to understand art to be only what we see and hear in theatres, concerts, and exhibition; together with buildings, statues, poems, and novels . . . But all this is but the smallest part of the art which we communicate with one another in life. All human life is filled with works of art of every kind—from cradle-song, jest, mimicry, the ornamentation of houses, dress, and utensils, to church services, buildings, monuments, and triumphal processions. It is all artistic activity. So that by art, in the limited sense of the word, we do not mean all human activity transmitting feelings, but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach some importance.

This special importance has always been given to that part of activity which transmits feelings flowing from their religious perception, and this small part they have specifically called art, attaching to it the full meaning of the word.

Perhaps we have been too conscious of art as a thing in itself instead of being artless about it! Whatever the case, communication is a fact of human existence. We communicate whether we wish to do so or not. If we are glum we communicate unhappiness; if we are joyful we communicate that delight. There is a desire in the human heart to know all it can know, to acquire useful and stimulating knowledge. Most human beings prefer this knowledge to come to them through looking, hearing and reading. They value the ruminations of wise people, and the conclusions they come to. A woman came to talk over with me her problem. When we concluded the conversation—in this case quite successfully—she said, 'I told my husband that I wanted to talk with a man who is old and wise.' There was comfort in what she might have called 'assured knowledge'.

Artists in every field are those who have special perceptions and the ability to transmit them to others. As we have seen, 'God has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that by searching he cannot find out the end from the beginning.' He must get knowledge. The artist

believes his knowledge (insights, communications) has substance and will be valuable to the recipient of it. Since we are all artists of one kind or another, we have the joy and responsibility of communicating our insights and understandings.

The question then arises as to motivation and the way of our communication. By 'motivation' we mean what moves us, and by 'the way' we do not so much mean the method as the relationship we have with God, with man, and with His universe.

## MOTIVATION OF CREATIVE COMMUNICATION

Milton's often-quoted lines in his poem *Lycidas* (l.64) are apt for our discussion,

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
 (That last infirmity of noble mind)  
 To scorn delights, and live laborious days;  
 But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,  
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
 Comes to the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears  
 And slits the thin-spun life.

In context Milton is saying that what we do is motivated by fame, for which we will 'scorn delights and live laborious days'. He warns us that fame is 'That last infirmity of noble minds', i.e. we may think our motives to be pure, but behind them will be the desire for fame. He warns that if this is the case then death will come to cheat us. With the believer the driving force of his whole life is God Himself. It is here we must remember the rich doctrine of the Everlasting Presence, i.e. God is never absent from us, but indwells us, as we do Him, and the action of the child of God is a concerted one with God.

When the action is concerted we need never worry about the quality of art, the quality of what we do or create. Concerted action is prophetic action. God will initiate it but we will execute it. This removes any cause for pride. Paul said, 'I laboured more than them all, yet not I but the grace of God in me.' God is always in action is a principle we must remember. We must also recognize that His action is always that of holy love. This will always save us from cheap, crass and impure communication.

It will always bring us to the kind of action which is sensitive to man's situation—the dilemma of his fallenness in the presence of God's utter holiness and righteousness. It will cause us to see man through God's eyes—as much as He enables a human being to do so. In Luke 4:18–19 Jesus spoke of what he had come to do—to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of liberation of the Lord. Rightly understood, these are great works of mercy, and touch every point of the lostness, blindness, hopelessness and existential anguish of man. If we did not know the message of the Cross and God's love in our sins, griefs and sorrows being borne as well as the healing of our wounds, then we would have nothing to communicate.

Now the communication of these things—as we saw in our last study—is by witness. That is, it has happened to us: we can tell about it. We can communicate it. And we must, but we must do so with purity. In I Corinthians 1:17 and 2:4–5 Paul disdained to use clever and brilliant speech and reasoning to catch men's minds. In I Corinthians 4:1–2 he said that we are stewards of the mysteries of God and must be found faithful. In II Corinthians 2:17 he averred, 'We are not like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.' In II Corinthians 4:2 he added, 'We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with

God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.'

### **APPLICATION TO THE WAY OF COMMUNICATION**

Two sections above we said, 'By motivation we mean what moves us, and by the way we go does not so much mean the method as the relationship we have with God, with man, and with His universe.' We then talked of concerted action with God—God being the Initiator and we being the co-operating doers. If we are going to apply ourselves to communication then we will need to cultivate what Jesus called 'abiding', that is living, dwelling and acting in God. Only in this way can we constantly know Him, our fellow-creatures and the creation. We have seen that the powers of darkness constantly bombard us with false information and misinformation. They also accuse us and seek to confuse us. This calls for the constant 'renewing of the mind' (Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 4:23–24; Col. 3:10).

We have also seen that communicators must live in freedom. I have found that when my mind has been occupied with heavy responsibility, when I have been ground down with worry and anxiety, and busy about many things, that true creativity dries up. The way we go about things communicates itself, and that is not the message we wish to give. Once released from these things—or, better still, having a sensible attitude to them—I am released into new creative activity. By this we do not mean we should live a carefree life and will thus be creative. In fact, where there is no suffering there is little genuine creativity. Where we do not enter into the suffering of God, of man, and the entire creation, then our so-called creativity will be facile, superficial and shallow. True freedom lies in participation in the human race and its suffering. We may not always communicate solutions, but we will communicate love. We are not often competent to solve problems, but we can witness to God and His sovereign holy love, which, in itself, is really the answer to human problems.

Note: The article which accompanied a previous study, and which was entitled Immediacy in Life and Communication, devotes a section to the nature of immediacy which arises out of suffering, and this section is included here for convenient reading:

### **THE COST AND WAY OF PRESENT IMMEDIACY**

Probably no greater expression of communication-in-ardency can be found than Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. It is filled with the passion to proclaim. In it the cost of immediacy is set out. The two great passages of his sufferings and labours—6:4–12 and 11:21–29—tell us of his love for the doomed race. In 4:7–15 he tells us of the identification with the heart of the Gospel which is essential to true preaching. We have the transcendent power of God in our earthly vessels, and whilst we are always carrying about with us the killing of Jesus, we will always be afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down. The reaction to the act of crucifixion—elsewhere described as 'a scandal' and 'foolishness'—will inevitably come and vent its anger on the messenger, so much one is he with his Lord-being-crucified. Such immediacy is present in the preacher on this matter that the hearer reacts as did the hysterical Christ-hating mob on the day of his death. Yet it is the only way of communicating. Whilst this form of death works in the proclaimer, it brings life to the listener. Not only is Christ's death shown, but his very life is communicated to the hearer. That is how 'grace comes to more and more people'.

We see, then, that we cannot communicate Christ apart from Christ, his death apart from his death, and his life apart from his life. Only love will bring us to this—the love which springs from intimate fellowship with the Father and the Son. This alone explains the martyrs and their

fearlessness in the face of death. It explains the great preachers down through the centuries such as Paul, Peter and Apollos; as Polycarp and Ignatius; Augustine and Tertullian; Calvin, Luther and Zwingli; the Pietists and the Puritans; Jonathan Edwards, the Wesley brothers, George Whitefield and the Welsh Itinerants; the Evangelicals of the nineteenth century, and then the preachers and teachers such as Charles Spurgeon, James Denney and Peter Forsyth. Nor must we miss the missionary passion which broke out in the first few centuries and carried on down through the centuries through a holy remnant until in the nineteenth century it broke out afresh, and has carried multitudes into the Kingdom of God. In our age the suffering of believers has been immense—no less than in any other age.

In all of this there has been holy ardency and holy immediacy, so that he—Christ—has seen the fruit of the travail of his soul, and has been satisfied.

Part of our application to communication is the sheer insistence that we will be about the matter. That means honing up our skills—being better artists, sculptors, writers, musicians, architects, photographers, technicians and the like. It means opening our eyes to what is around, below and above us—seeing with new perception. It is taking up responsibility to be true craftsmen. It means using the facilities at hand—not disdaining any, and keeping free of pride, conceit and elitism. It means placing ourselves in genuine humility at the feet of masters of our art or craft, and listening to them, learning what we can both about the meaning of art, and the ways of it.

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