

THE QUESTIONING DIMENSION OF COMMUNICATION

Charles NDHLOVU¹

¹PhD, Fr. Malawi, Africa

Corresponding author: Charles Ndhlovu; e-mail: mkhalirachiuta123@gmail.com

Abstract

The human being is a questioning being. The human person's nature is to raise questions. The human person as such cannot live and cannot be without raising questions. In my culture generally people raise questions about the mystery of life; the mystery of birth, the mystery of pregnancy, the mystery of life, the mystery of death, the mystery of the graveyard, the mystery of life after the tomb, the mystery of the lives of animals – how they survive, how animals live, where animals survive, where they live and how they feed themselves and what keeps them in sustenance. People question about their tomorrow, about their career, about their hopes, about their expectations, about their failures, about their successes, about who they are and what they would like to be and become.

Keywords: *communication, theology, salvific history, eucharist.*

1. INTRODUCTION

People question about their past and their future. The past seems to have passed so quickly and yet the future remains an undefined project and program – what was yesterday and what will become tomorrow and after tomorrow and in the future seems to be a difficult and an unknown project and programme. This is the basis of not only intrapersonal communication or self-reflection, contemplation and even self-talk but it is also the basis of interpersonal communication and in some instances it is the basis of group communication.

Intrapersonal communication takes place as human being seek to understand themselves. They sit and contemplate and communicate within themselves on the things that they want to be and to achieve. It is to communicate within oneself about the goals and the plans and the objectives that one wishes to accomplish in his or her life. This is what intrapersonal communication is and it represents an important aspect of communication.

Intrapersonal communication in this case involves the communication within oneself about what one wants and what one wants to be but also the questioning regarding the mystery of his or her own life. The questioning aspect of communication in this case helps the human being to communicate within oneself as one looks for answers within oneself or in the surrounding environment. This is what intrapersonal communication is and it represents an important aspect of communication.

In the case of interpersonal communication, the questioning capacity of the human being helps him to start asking deep questions within oneself but these questions are faced in dialogue with other people. These questions become the subject on which communication takes place. The questions become the basis of communication. In interpersonal communication, two people may equally raise questions together in order to find out the solutions to their common problems. This is interpersonal communication and it represents an important aspect of human life. In this case, one would say that questioning is the locus of communication. Questioning is an important aspect of communication. Questioning is communication – as one raises the questions, he communicates not only to himself but also to others.

Questioning is also the basis for group communication – many people come together to celebrate, share, and exchange not only answers to questions but they also meet to exchange views on things that affect them – on questions that they wish to answer – on the issues that they wish to confront and face. These are important aspects of communication. In my culture, usually people stay and come together to answer deep questions of existence – deep questions that affect life – deep questions that affect the life of every member of the community. That is why

there is interdependence among people – and to celebrate this fact, there are so many problems that show this aspect – for example they will say – you can only enjoy eating okra, if you share it with others – or you can share anything and everything except the clothes that one is wearing. All these are ways in which people share and resolve their issues.

The same could be said about globality – the fact that we come together not only to resolve the questions that are difficult for each one of us, but that we also come together to resolve various international difficulties and questions. The world comes together to resolve and cry together about the things that are painful and things that we don't understand – how we came together after the September 11, 2001 attacks and deaths in America – how we came together to face the questions paused by the world financial crisis; how we came together to face the issues around the wars in the world, notably the two world wars, the wars in Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, the problems in Sudan, the problems in Congo, the apartheid in South Africa, the scathing poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa and many other difficult political, social, cultural, and economic difficulties and questions that we have faced together collectively. In the words of McLuhan, the world has become one small village – and that means that the questions that we face are communal and global. That is why there is now an important and interesting issue of glocality. This means that the issues that are local have a universal colouring – that what affects people in Africa affects people in India as well – that what affects people in America or in Asia, or India becomes the issue of other people as well. The local enters and shares in the global – that the global affects the local – and this is glocality. One cannot live today on an island of isolation. One cannot live alone anymore. One shares in the global – that is why what happens in one part of the world, affects the people on the other part of the world – that the disease outbreak in Congo affects the American who is on the same plane – and we saw how this happened with regard to the Ebola outbreak.

That is why soldiers that are Malawians can go and fight in Congo – on behalf of the United Nations. That is why, soldiers from America or United Kingdom will go and fight overseas – we

are one people – united together. We fight in these wars because we question, we find answers and we seek for peace together.

We may be different, we may have different racial provenience, different colour of the skin, some could be Asians, whites, blacks, Indians, Senegalese, Americans, Canadians, Irish, Zambians, Malawians, male or female, adults or children or indeed otherwise, but we all face similar questions and come together as God's children looking for answers to the questions paused. This is the communication dimension of questioning – we question together, we look for answers together, we find answers together and we sometimes fail to find answers together. As we question together, we communicate. As we dialogue about answers – we communicate. As we face each other and wonder in silence – faced with the mystery of the question – in silence too, we communicate – probably that is why it is usually said that one cannot not communicate because not to communicate means to communicate – silence is communication!

This usually leads us to the mystery dimension of communication, especially to the religious aspect of questioning. The human being communicates his or her questions about divinity. The human being realises that he or she lacks solidity – that he or she lacks foundational basis. The human being realises that he or she lacks ground for his or her own existence. That he or she cannot be on themselves – that there should be a being – that should be the basis of his or her existence – this is basically the uncaused cause. The human being is faced with difficult questions especially about his or her limitedness – who am I? Why do I die? Why was I born? What is the project of my life? Why is it that today I am strong and tomorrow I am weak? Why do we lack solidity in our life? Why do we fail to be what we want to be and become? Why am I strong today and then weak tomorrow? If we lack this personal solidity then there should be a being, which should be the ground of our existence, and this is the being that grounds one's existence. So, the human being, questions about his or her own existence – these questions are answered personally, interpersonally, in groups and even globally. That is why the religious dimension based on questioning about

the Supreme Being is not only personal, but it is also a global phenomenon.

That is why; the questioning dimension has led to personal, group and global spirituality and/or religious groupings. For example, there are so many Churches that are not only personal spiritualities, but also regional, national, local and global religious groups. All these in their own way seek for answers to existence – answers about life, about existence, about God, and about the meaning of life. The questioning and answering is a communicational dimension.

In addition, the answer to the question leads to new questioning. For example, one discovers that the ground of being is God. This answers the following question: who is the ground of being? It is God. That is an answer but that becomes the basis of new questioning, namely: what is the nature of this God? Who is this God? What are the attributes of this God and this is basically answered in metaphysics and to some extent in Theodicy, other philosophies and theological disciplines in general.

One would ask: so when does this questioning end? Or does questioning end? In order to answer this question, it is important to understand that questioning leads us slowly into infinity – the more we answer one question, the more we ask another question, and so on and so forth until we move into infinity – in the *vorgriff*. This means that questioning is endless and if questioning is endless then I can also submit that the communicational dimension inherent in questioning also moves into the *vorgriff* and into the unlimited. We question endlessly and we communicate endlessly – into infinity – until we reach the beatific vision where we will see God face to face and we will behold the mystery of God endlessly – we will sit there and question endlessly – we will never reach a point where we fully and completely comprehend and encompass the mystery of God – we are creatures and we cannot fully encompass the mystery of the creator! We can thus say that communication is inherent in questioning. When we question, we are either doing it at the intrapersonal level, or at the interpersonal level, or at the group level and sometimes even at the global level. That is why the concept of glocality has a lot of meaning in questioning but also in communicating the

answers to our questions. We can even go as far as saying that the human being is a questioning being since to question and answer is to communicate.

2. THE COMMUNICATION DIMENSION IN SALVIFIC HISTORY

The communication of God's word to the human being has over the centuries taken place in different forms, different ways and through different personages. This communication has shaped the life of the human being in different ways and to this communication the human person has given different responses, affirmatively and negatively.

We wish in this paper to analyse different periods of salvation history and give a historical perspective. We make this analysis from a Communication Theology perspective. In doing this, we use many theories of communication that will guide us in critically looking at different periods. We will enter and extract important and communicational aspects which will be analysed in the light of the different communicational theories.

We begin by looking at the Adamitic period – the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. During this time, it is worth mentioning and worth noting that the communication that characterized the relationship between the first couple and God was that of face to face communication. One would be tempted to think that the communication between God and the first couple was unidirectional. This would find some evidence from the fact that it is only later on after the forbidden fruit had been eaten that the dialogue or two way communication really becomes clear. However, in the first chapters, the couples engage in a conversation with the snake from which it emerges that God had forbidden them to eat the forbidden fruit. The snake finds a basis here for deceiving the couple.

However, after the couple ate the forbidden fruit, they began to converse and talk to God face to face. Again, a reminder here that this is a temptation to think about it in this way, however, I do believe that from the beginning, the communication could have been a two-way

traffic and not necessarily unidirectional. However, after the account of the eating of the forbidden fruit, thereafter we read about the discussion between the man, the woman and God. It is at this point that the issue of dialogue and real conversation really becomes evident.

From this account, one can notice that the Adamitic period was characterized by the communication between God and the human being. The communication was not only verbal, but also face to face communication. I am sure Lasswell would say, God was the sender of the message, to the human person, in the medium of the word - the language, the effect, feedback and response was given, but it wasn't in the affirmative at all. The result was that the human being was punished by God.

The patriarchal period however was characterized by interpersonal communication in which God would call the patriarch in question. God would call the person concerned, for example, God called Abraham, Jacob and Isaac. He had a specific message and specific function for each of them. God called the patriarchs to fulfil a particular function and a particular duty. He called Abraham who became the father of faith and father of the nations. He called Jacob through whom the twelve tribes of Israel would come about. God's communication did not fall on ears that were non-responsive. Abraham responded affirmatively by leaving the Ur heading towards the land of milk and honey. Jacob responded affirmatively as well, ending up in Egypt in the Goshen area where his twelve tribes later became slaves.

All this eventually means that communication brings an effect - that communication can change people's way of thinking - it can change people's direction in life as it did with Abraham and the other patriarchs. The dialogue that characterized their communication with God was the basis on whose foundation a relationship between God and the patriarchs grew. God's way of communicating his message with the patriarchs was clear and unambiguous. Good communication removes ambiguity and noise - it removes uncertainty so that the response may match the intention of the sender. Bad and poor communication results in getting a response that may be totally unrelated to the message that is

sent. The clarity of God's communication made it much easy for Abraham and the other patriarchs to respond in the right manner.

That is why many communication experts, academicians and experts believe that the minimization or absolute removal of noise, distraction and ambiguity in the process of communication are crucial for getting the right response - be it in the affirmative or in the negative. When there is non-communication, the sender has his own views which the recipient may not even know. The sender may think the message has been sent when actually there is no message sent. Or the recipient may respond in a certain way to a message that means something else. All this leads to confusion and ambiguity in communication.

Regardless of the means of communication used, the goal is to arrive at clarity of information so that the sender sends a message that the recipient can properly understand. Whether one uses verbal communication, or non-verbal communication, whether one uses words, gestures, or clothing, the aim is to reach the clarity of the message. Any communication that fails to clear out ambiguity is bad communication, which means nothing and is therefore absolutely useless and it is a complete distraction! God was clear in his communication of what he wanted the patriarchs to do and that is why the response was given. That is why the communication theory that Shannon names noise represents one of the aspects that can affect communication and the transmission of information.

Additionally, we notice God's communication in the mosaic period. During this period, God communicated his message to Moses. The message was directed to the people of Israel calling on them to go out of Egypt and worship God at the mount of Sinai. The message was given by God, directed through the mediation and medium of Moses and then meant for the people of Israel. This was group communication and ritual communication. It was group communication because of the number of people that were involved in the communication process - God speaking to so many people - God calling on so many people - God's message appealing to so many people to move from Egypt to Canaan. Eventually having fulfilled everything that was

needed, the people of God left Egypt to worship God at the mountain of Horeb or Sinai. This is exactly the response that God wanted from the people of God – the Israelites.

We would also add here that God's communication was ritual communication and we can here not help but think of Carey. Communication here did not just involve the traditional aspects of sender, message, recipient, feedback, response or effect but this was communal, ritualistic, a network of complex relationships, a big group of people were involved, and one cannot but think about rituals like the cooking of unleavened bread, leaving at night, painting the door flames, the power of Moses' walking stick, hitting the rock with a stick so that water would come out, eating manna, the rituals around the worship in the tent of the meeting, raising and dropping of Moses' hands as the war was being fought, the sprinkling of people with blood, and looking at the serpent and getting healed, among other examples.

These are rituals and there was strong and big communication that was attached to this kind of communication. These were big miracles and I totally agree as an orthodox communication theologian – who submits to the Church – but I also agree with those who think that there is a ritualistic dimension attached to these communicational elements. Each of those actions and rituals, communicate a message – the way of doing it, the perception of the faith community, the faith of Moses, the power of God and the destruction or eventual annihilation of the enemy. These are wonderful rituals which stayed long in the minds of the people – and we can here easily apply the F.X. Dance's communication dimension of replicating memories. The Carey's dimension of ritual communication would help these people to carry with them these stories, these happenings and project them into the future – so that they would later share with their children – and keep these stories in their memory. These memories would help them keep faith in God – a God who saved them from Egypt in a dramatic way!

The same would happen in the Exilic and post-exilic communication. God continued to send different prophets and different people to assure the Israelites who were in Babylon that

they would later be liberated and they would be allowed to go back to their country, where they would build a country that they wanted – that they would live a life that they longed for and dreamed for – that they would be what they had always wanted and dreamt to be and to become, that they would be what they wanted to be. This hope was communicated through prophetic communication. Through the prophets, God called on the people to continue to hope, to continue to worship in the way that they wanted to worship and to continue to believe in God. That is why people would gather along the river and sing songs of hope. They cried together, sang together, believed together, believing that a day would come when they would sing in the words of Luther King, free at last, free at last! The people believed that one day they would be liberated and then they would build the temple and worship God and build their city and live together as a people befitting the dignity of God. The communication during this time was characterized by mediation – the medium of the prophets. It was mediated, given through the medium of human instrumentation. The sender of the message was God, the oppressed people of God represented the recipients, through the mediation or medium of prophets. The response and effect or feedback was varied – but communication had taken place. With regard to Jesus' communication, which this author has treated elsewhere, we can here briefly say that Jesus' communication of the good news used verbal and non-verbal communication. Jesus was the fullness of God's communication to man. He is the absolute and perfect communication of God. The same was clear in the post-apostolic communication in which God communicated his message through the apostles. The apostles were the mediators and the medium through which God would speak to his people. The response again here was varied. People would either accept it or would reject the offer of salvation. In any case, communication had taken place.

Conclusively, we would say that if one was to progress in this way, he or she would go into specific details in order to analyse and show that the salvific history can indeed be looked at, studied and can be considered under the communication dimension. We have in this

paper, showed how the different periods of salvation history are characterized by the communication dimension, beginning with the Adamitic period, the patriarchal period, the mosaic period, the exilic and post-exilic period and finally we ended with the communication dimension during Jesus' and apostolic periods.

3. THE COMMUNICATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE EUCHARIST

We are going to explore the communicational aspect of the sacrament of the Eucharist. We will be basically looking at those aspects of the Eucharist that are communicational not only from the side of God to the human person, but also from the human being to God. We shall look at the Eucharist from a communicational perspective - namely the graces that God communicates to the human being and the prayers of supplication, intercession, praise and worship that the human being communicates to God.

As a preamble, mention should be made here of the fact that it is the same Jesus that is offered in the Eucharist and on the Cross, but what is different is the way Jesus is offered. On the Cross, the manner of sacrificial offering consisted in the shedding of blood but, in the Eucharist the manner of sacrificial offering is transubstantiation in which the gifts of wine and bread become the body and blood of Jesus through the words of consecration and at the *epiclesis*.

Both events, the death of Jesus on the Cross, and the sacrificial offering of Jesus in the Eucharist, are a communication of the graces of God. God sends his graces to the human being who is the recipient. These graces are sent through the mediation of a priest in the prayer of consecration and the effect of such a grace filled action is that the bread and wine, become body and blood of Jesus.

Both events, have a salvific effect. Both events, the death of Jesus on the Cross and the sacrificial offering of Jesus in the Eucharist are a communication of the graces of God - this communication has salvific effect. As we have also said and written elsewhere, the roles of recipient and sender are interchangeable - the

human being not only receives the graces of God, but he also becomes the sender of intercession, worship and praise to God.

It is a double movement of sending and receiving. God sends the graces for the human being, just as the human being sends prayers and petition to God, who responds. It is a communication that leads to the sanctification of the human being - that is the effect especially in the liturgical celebration and at mass in general terms.

The Eucharist communicates, draws back and plugs into the bloody sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and that is why the bread becomes body and the wine becomes blood - that body of the historical Jesus that was bruised and wounded - that blood of Jesus of Nazareth who gushed out at Golgotha.

The Eucharist is the sacrament of sacraments as we read from the Catechism of the Catholic Church because it is concerned with the deepest mystery of the life of the Church. In the Eucharist, the bread becomes the real body of Jesus and wine becomes the real blood of Jesus Christ. This is basically the doctrine of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist - that it is not just appearance but real - not just appearance but the real Christ!

It is thus not only a communication of something like Christ - or something that appears like Christ but the Eucharist is the communication of the real Christ - we commune with the real Christ - and that's communion - *communis* from which the word communication derives.

That is why, the Eucharist is not only the sacrament of sacraments - but it is also the sacrament of communion - the sacrament of communication. It is a sacrament through which the individual person is brought time and again into communion of the mystical body of Christ, that is in communion with Jesus and then in communion with other Christians.

The Eucharist is not only private, it is public. As a public celebration, it brings into communion - into communication, the received Jesus with the human being - not only as an individual, but it brings the single person into communion with other recipients because they all share the same Christ.

Communion is an important word and element in the ritual theory of communication and F.X. Dance, a communication scholar, cites communion

as an important communicational word. Communion is communication - to commune is to communicate - to communicate is to bring commonness - common ground - understanding, sharing and participation - which comes about because of communion in Christ.

That is why Jesus' prayer before the disciples was - *may they be one!* It is in this perspective that we can say that there is horizontal and vertical communication in the Eucharist. The human being receives graces from God, but also stands in a special relationship with the other persons who have received the Eucharist. We commune not only with Jesus but through Jesus, we commune with other people and that's the mystical body of Jesus!

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is very emphatic on the importance of the Eucharist when it states that the Eucharist is the centre of the Church's liturgy - it is a sacred mystery - the most Blessed Sacrament and it is the sacrament of sacraments. The sacrament of the Eucharist was instituted by Christ himself. The Eucharist is a sacrament that communicates and nourishes the life of grace that is received at baptism. Through the Eucharist, we are also able to participate in the suffering of Jesus Christ. This in a nutshell is the communicational dimension of the sacrament of the Eucharist!

For bibliographical references please address the author.