

# Human communication revisited – A biblical perspective

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Communication is very important in our daily lives. It is the most common everyday activity and it is at the core of all human contact. It permeates every aspect of who we are and what we do, and is a highly complex human phenomenon. The ability to communicate is a gift from God to enable us to develop relationships with others and to create culture. Studying and theorising about communication will enable us to discover 'serviceable insights' to help us to become good stewards of everything that God has entrusted to us. The Bible gives us a grand historical narrative of the cosmos, helping us to understand the fact that God created the world and its people. This article argued that the Creation-Fall-Redemption motif or theme, which is a highly schematised version of the Bible's grand narrative, could be used as a framework to help us understand and teach communication from an integrated Christian perspective. The clarion call is to redeem communication so that it can be appropriately used directionally for what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable (Phlp 4:8). As far as communication is concerned, integration of faith and learning should encompass what we teach (content), how we teach that content (pedagogy), and how what we teach impacts the way we think, what we believe, and how we live (our character).

**Menslike kommunikasie herbesoek – 'n Bybelse perspektief.** Kommunikasie is baie belangrik in ons daaglikse lewens. Dit is die mees algemene alledaagse aktiwiteit en vorm deel van die kern van alle menslike kontak. Dit deurdring elke aspek van wie ons is en wat ons doen en is 'n hoogs-komplekse menslike fenomeen. Die vermoë om te kommunikeer is 'n geskenk van God wat ons in staat stel om verhoudings met ander te ontwikkel en kultuur te skep. Die bestudering en teoretisering oor kommunikasie sal ons in staat stel om 'diensbare insigte' te ontdek, wat ons sal help om goeie rentmeesters te wees van alles wat God aan ons toevertrou het. Die Bybel gee aan ons 'n uitgebreide historiese narratief van die kosmos wat ons help om te verstaan dat God die wêreld, asook die mens geskep het. Hierdie artikel het geargumenteer dat die Skepping-Sondeval-Verlossingstema of –motief, wat as 'n hoogs-geskematiseerde weergawe van die Bybelse uitgebreide narratief beskou kan word, as 'n raamwerk kan dien om ons te help om kommunikasie vanuit 'n geïntegreerde Christelike perspektief te verstaan en te onderrig. Die wekroep is om kommunikasie vry te maak sodat dit rigtinggewend en gepas gebruik kan word vir wat waar, rein, regverdig, lieflik en loflik is (Fil 4:8). Wat kommunikasie betref, behoort die integrasie van geloof en leer te omsluit wat ons onderrig (inhoud), hoe ons die inhoud onderrig (pedagogie), asook die wyse waarop dit wat ons onderrig ons denke, ons geloof en hoe ons leef (ons karakter) beïnvloed.

## Introduction

What is communication? How can we understand the reality of communication in the light of faith? How can the Christian faith and a Biblical understanding inform the teaching of communication? What does integration of faith and learning mean? My response to these questions is anchored in a Christian view of the world and life as reflected in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. The Christian worldview is therefore the lens through which these issues will be examined. In this article, I will try to develop a Biblical Christian perspective on communication. I will firstly briefly look at Christian higher education and the integration of faith and learning. Then I will discuss communication as an academic field and examine the Biblical foundation for communication. Lastly, I will illustrate how I teach communication studies and reflect on God's call for us to make a difference in the world.

## Christian higher education

My philosophy of Christian higher education is rooted in an understanding of the Kingdom of God. This kingdom is both a present reality and a future hope. Whilst we wait for the consummation of the age, our call is to erect signposts of God's liberating kingdom by the way we live and the way

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we carry out various cultural activities including Christian higher education. Key elements in my understanding of Christian higher education include the following: it must be concerned with both a new way of thinking, as well as a lifestyle that conforms to the Word of God. Its foundation is therefore a biblical Christian worldview that equips and enables students to challenge, by their lifestyles, the prevailing value systems of their society; and it must develop and operate within specific cultural contexts. However, it must also provide normative frameworks that analyse, give direction to all human activities, and promote a sense of community in the classroom.

As one of many vocations, tertiary or higher education is one of many cultural enterprises that God wants us to develop according to biblical norms and values. Christian higher education therefore should approach teaching and learning from a biblical worldview that emphasises stewardship and responsibility, and prepare students for lives of service in the world.

Christian higher education is holistic and enables the formation of liberally educated students who love God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind (Dt 6:5; Mt 22:27), and who desire to grow into wise human beings. James 3:13 in the New International Version (NIV) Bible says: 'Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.' Liberal arts Christian higher education focuses on educating the whole person to understand the meaning and purpose of life – helping students discuss and reflect on what it means to be truly human in different contexts. Lyon and Beaty (1999) suggest that this could encompass issues such as how to be a friend, a good neighbour, a responsible citizen, a son or daughter, a future spouse and parent, or being a good steward of money, God's creation and human culture. Christian higher education also helps students understand that God is the source of truth in all academic disciplines – this means that it transcends any awkward conjunctions of faith and learning (Holmes 1989). It is different from education at public universities whose aim is 'simply to form professionals, citizens, and broadly defined leaders, to whom they provide generally defined capacities such as critical thinking' (Glanzer 2012). Therefore, Christian higher education does not focus exclusively on producing technical experts.

Christian higher education is more than just providing students with a lot of information on various subjects. It should *inter alia* (Ringenberg 2003; Opitz & Melleby 2007; Smith 2009; Eaton 2011; Dockery 2012):

- enable students to learn about God the Creator and his creation
- help students develop their minds and be intellectually curious about the whole cosmos
- encourage students to see, learn and interpret life from a biblical Christian worldview
- focus on theoretical and abstract ideas, as well as practical issues and concerns

- help students develop competencies necessary to think Christianly and carry out their work in a professional manner
- contribute to character development and formation that distinguishes them as peculiar people who live their lives as God desires
- help students use their abilities and their training in the service of others as they work for social and cultural transformation
- help students understand the nature and purpose of the intellect
- help students identify and understand their God-given abilities
- contribute to the process that enables students to prepare for the vocation to which God calls them.

I agree with Nancy Pearcey (2005) who had this to say about education:

Education should aim at equipping students to take up their vocation in obedience to the Cultural Mandate. Each [student] should understand that God has given him or her special gifts to make a unique contribution to humanity's task of reversing the effects of the Fall and extending the Lordship of Christ in the world. As the poet John Milton once wrote, the goal of learning 'is to repair the ruins of our first parents.' To that, every subject area should be taught from a solidly biblical perspective so that students grasp the interconnections among the disciplines, discovering for themselves that all truth is God's truth. (p. 129)

It is also important to remember that the mind is a great gift from God to be used to understand and enjoy God's creation, amongst other things. We can also use it in serving God and others or it can be an idol in which to trust. A good Christian higher education therefore equips students to develop and use their mind to learn so that they can effectively function in the world. For example, through the human and natural sciences, students can learn of the world and prepare for a vocation. As stated by Ringenberg (2003):

For the Christian, vocation is not merely a job to earn money; it is that but much more, also. The Christian views vocation as a calling, a sacred mission from God to contribute to the world. Also, the best formal education creates the desire for informal, life-long learning and growing. (p. 317)

Through Christian higher education, we can identify, discern and embrace the good creational insights and structure that God designed for every area of life (Wolters 2005). Academic institutions have an important role to play in this endeavour.

John Kok (2004) suggests that every institution of Christian higher education that values academic excellence and biblical faith should properly prepare its graduates. This involves equipping them with the ability to deal insightfully with issues, theories, problems, past alternatives, new movements and initiatives in their academic discipline in a way that is in line with Scripture. A good curriculum (and co-curriculum) should contribute to this process by leading students to develop wisdom and discernment, and to live a life of humility, curiosity and delight. As Kok (2004:104) points out: 'A good curriculum tells a story and invites students to participate in that story'.

## Integration of faith and learning

Discussions about the integration of faith and learning have been going on for several decades now. It was part of discussions in the 1940s as academics grappled with how to respond to the challenge of engaging the field of scholarship in a Christian manner (Timmerman 1975; Sinnema 2001). Since then, there has been a lot of discussion and debate on what it means to integrate faith and learning. In this section, I will identify just a few voices on this issue.

Hasker (1992) describes faith-learning integration as:

a scholarly project whose goal is to ascertain and to develop integral relationships, which exist between the Christian faith and human knowledge, particularly as expressed in the various academic disciplines. (p. 235)

He sees this as the responsibility of Christians who are involved in teaching and scholarship. Heie and Wolfe (1987) explain that integration:

emphasizes the fundamental search for commonalities between the Christian faith and the substantive, methodological, and value assumption that underlie activity in the academic disciplines, as well as attempts to systematize academic learning into an overarching Christian schema. (p. vii)

For Wilhoit (1987:78), integration reflects 'the idea of harmonization or a bringing together of separate parts into a coherent unity'. Fischer (1989:23) affirms the same view when he explains that 'integration means the bringing together of that which is apart'. This model of integration assumes that the Christian faith and academic disciplines are two separate elements whose relationships need to be identified and developed (Sinnema 2001:189). Holmes (1987) cautions that faith and learning interact rather than integrate; therefore, it is an ideal that only God can fully accomplish. He recommends that integration should be seen as an intellectual activity that will go on as long as people continue learning. On the other hand, Holmes (1987:16) argues that the distinctive character of a Christian college 'should be an education that cultivates the creative and active integration of faith and learning, of faith and culture'. Christian scholars, including Burwell (1979), Lyon (1983), Nelson (1987), Fischer (1989), Sinnema (2001) and Sweetman (2001), have proposed various approaches or strategies to integration. Earlier on in 1983, Wolterstorff (1983:15) suggested that because 'integration' had become much of a password, there should be a 10-year moratorium on its use in Christian colleges. However, the issue of faith-learning integration did not take a back seat; Christian scholars continued talking about it and some developed strategies to aid the process. We will now highlight one approach to integration.

Nelson (1987) developed a threefold classification of strategies for integration – compatibilist, transformationalist and reconstructionist. The compatibilist strategy works on the assumption that the Christian faith and a specific academic discipline are already compatible. Therefore, the scholar's task is to demonstrate the potential unity that exists between them and not try to question or challenge

any underlying assumptions. The second classification is the transformationalist strategy, which asserts that there is tension between the Christian faith and a discipline. The Christian scholar who follows a transformationalist strategy works from the premise that there are some legitimate insights, validity and integrity to the assumptions of a particular discipline. However, because it lacks insights and perspectives anchored in a Christian worldview, one can work to 'transform his discipline into one with a Christian orientation' (Wolfe 1987:4). The third classification is the reconstructionist strategy. It finds a basic tension between the assumptions and claims of a given discipline and the Christian faith. It argues that all the disciplines are deeply permeated with secularism, rationalism and naturalism; therefore, they must be rejected in order to redesign those disciplines from distinctively biblical foundations. Hasker (1992:242) suggests that these three strategies should be viewed as three points on a continuum rather than three mutually exclusive alternatives.

Sinnema (2001) points out that even though the goal of the integration model is a unified view, it is still dualistic because of its argument on the unity of truth. Sinnema (2001:191) contends that '[i]ntegration, by seeking to bring together different realms of faith and learning, seems to deny that truth is already one'. He argues that faith and learning are not separate because faith affects a person's whole life including their thinking. No learning can be separated from faith, because faith is integral to all learning. This is because all learning is based on some faith, either a formally religious faith or a secular faith (Marsden 2001:21). Also, since existing scholarship is often grounded in secular beliefs in conflict with Christian teaching, it is not a wise decision to integrate Christian faith with the secular parts of those theories (Sinnema 2001:195).

For the purpose of this article, I will approach the issue of integration of faith and learning from a practical point of view. In light of this, I will define integration as our ability to develop a fundamental relationship between the Christian faith, an academic discipline and Christian living. I will expand on this later in this article. Meanwhile, in the next section, I will look at how communication has developed into a field of academic studies.

## The field of communication

Miller (2005) observes that scholars have tried for thousands of years to come up with a systematic understanding of the communication process. Pearce and Foss (1990) traced the systematic study of communication to the Sophists of 5th century BC; the times of Plato and Aristotle; the Middle Ages; the humanistic revival of the Renaissance; the scientific study of the Enlightenment; through to the 20th century when communication was established as an academic discipline.

The modern field of communication includes eight major areas, namely, (1) intrapersonal communication, (2) interpersonal communication, (3) group and team communication, (4) public

communication, (5) performance, (6) media and new technologies of communication, (7) organisational communication and (8) intercultural communication (Wood 2004). Littlejohn and Foss (2008) observe that the academic study of communication focuses *inter alia* on human social interaction, how people use symbols to create meaning and thus build community. Rogers (1997) also points out that communication is a professional field, as well as a scientific discipline. On the other hand, it is a highly interdisciplinary area of study, because its development was shaped by scholarship from fields such as anthropology, economics, education, English, journalism, management, political science, psychology, rhetoric, sociology, and theatre (Abbott 2002; Miller 2005). Many communication concepts are often the focus of study in the humanities and social science departments. Thus, the academic study of communication by scholars from different disciplines spurred on interdisciplinary work, which resulted in the institutionalisation of the field of communication.

Over the years, scholars have wrestled and tried to define communication (Dance 1970; Miller 1966; Pearce 1989). In 1976, Dance and Larson documented over 120 definitions of communication. Since then, more scholars have added additional definitions or refined earlier ones. In spite of this, scholars do not agree on a single definition of communication (Littlejohn & Foss 2008). What is important to note, however, is that the early conceptualisations of communication as primarily a linear one (Lasswell 1948; Shannon & Weaver 1949), has been rejected by most communication scholars today. There is, however, convergence on three important concepts, namely that, (1) communication is a process, (2) it is symbolic and (3) it is transactional (Miller 2005:5).

## Convergence on three concepts

The process-oriented conceptualisation of communication portrays it as continuous and complex and one cannot arbitrarily isolate it. Advocates for the process nature of communication include Berlo (1960) and Lasswell (1948). Miller (2005) points out that:

when we look at communication as a process, we see that even simple interactions are influenced in complex ways by the past and will also have important implications for the future. (p. 6)

The concept of process, however, has a different meaning in communication theory. Anderson and Ross (2002) explain that process does not refer to a sequential way of doing things; on the contrary, it suggests that everything is interlinked, which sometimes makes it difficult to determine when something begins or ends.

Today, most communication researchers view communication in a transactional sense, describing it as a highly complex phenomenon. They describe communication as a process in which there is constant mutual influence of communication participants, reflecting the fact that people send and receive messages simultaneously. This understanding rejects the linear or transmission model that sees communication going in a unidirectional or back-and-forth manner. Instead of

*sender* and *receiver*, the transactional model uses the word *communicator* (Miller 2005; Adler & Proctor 2011). Julia Wood (2011:18) explains that this means that, at any given moment in communication, a person may be sending a message, listening to a message or doing both at the same time. On the other hand, Robert Craig (1999:127) argues that because people often think about communication in everyday life as the sending and receiving of information, the transmission view should not be rejected outright. He proposes that communication should be viewed in many different ways.

A third area of convergence is the view that communication is a symbolic process. Symbols, which can be verbal or non-verbal, are abstract, arbitrary and ambiguous representations of other things (Miller 2005; Knapp & Hall 2010; Wood 2011). As Verderber, Verderber and Sellnow (2010) point out, these symbols include words, sounds and actions that represent specific ideas and feelings. We communicate messages through verbal symbols (words), non-verbal cues (behaviours) and visual images. When we speak, we use word symbols to express meaning. We also use symbolic non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, eye contact, gestures and tone of voice, to express meaning.

Communication is very important to our daily lives. It is the most common everyday activity that is at the core of all human contact and fundamental and central to human life. It permeates every aspect of who we are and what we do. It is a process in which people interact with others using verbal and non-verbal symbols to create shared meaning or mutual understanding in different contexts using various channels (Knapp & Hall 2010; Wood 2011). Communication gives us the ability to share our beliefs, values, ideas, and feelings (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2010). It also enables us to build strong and healthy relationships, groups and communities.

The activities we collectively call communication include:

- talking
- listening
- having dialogues with ourselves
- watching television
- listening to the radio
- reading
- writing
- singing
- acting
- participating in group discussions
- browsing the internet
- interviewing or being interviewed
- creating visual images
- reacting to messages
- seeking and imparting information
- giving instructions and advice
- having conversations
- sharing significant ideas
- imparting knowledge.

These activities are so ordinary and mundane that they hardly arrest our attention. Therefore, we spend more time

communicating than doing anything else (Wood 2004; Carey 2009). Littlejohn and Foss (2008) note that, because communication is so intertwined with every aspect of human life, we sometimes overlook its pervasiveness, importance and complexity. As a matter of fact, every aspect of our daily lives is impacted by our communication with others, as well as by messages we receive from various people. No social system can function effectively without communication. Carey (2009) acknowledges that there is truth in Marshall McLuhan's assertion that just as the fish is unaware of water, which is the very medium that forms its ambience and supports its very existence, communicating through language and other symbolic forms comprise the ambience of human existence.

Communication is not only pervasive; it is also complex. Condit (2009) argues that it is 'not a machine-like phenomenon, in which a few discrete parts regularly produce a single, predictable outcome', neither is it 'the product of what an individual does in reaction to another individual'. On the contrary, Condit (2009) says it is:

an emergent phenomenon that arises from historical sedimentation and complex projective interactions among multiple variables including the individuals and contexts in which they are embedded and the ongoing temporal sedimentations of the interaction itself. (p. 9)

The complex nature of communication reminds us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14), with the incredible ability to communicate both verbally and non-verbally through face-to-face and mediated communication. Who we are reflects and affects our communication with others (Adler & Proctor 2011). Our self-concept, gender, personality and culture influence how we communicate, when we communicate, and what we communicate. Through communication 'we define, shape, redefine and even reflect the realities of our surrounding cultures' (Trowbridge 2012:323). As a phenomenon, it has complexities and ambiguities we cannot ignore, for example, how culture influences and shapes how we communicate.

## Communication and culture

Culture influences communication and communication affects culture (Hall 1976). Through communication, we learn, adapt and pass down culture from one generation to the next (Ting-Toomey 2005). As we learn culture through communication, we also use communication to express our culture (O'Hair & Wiemann 2012). Culture plays a very important role in how people observe reality and how they communicate that reality (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2010). Therefore, communication expresses, sustains and changes culture (Healey & O'Brien 2004; Jandt 2009; Schaller & Crandall 2004).

It is also worth noting that communication varies across cultures (Gudykunst 2003). People communicate differently from culture to culture. A person's culture shapes how

they communicate. For example, culture influences and determines who you talk to, how and about what you talk, when interrupting a conversation is appropriate, how much eye contact is polite, and how much distance should be kept between people who are interacting. During the process of communication, people learn a culture's worldview and rules of behaviour. Therefore, 'culture is the most basic and far-reaching context in which communicative processes are engaged and thus formed' (Kim 2002:28). However, the risk of misinterpreting communication is higher between people from different cultural backgrounds. Veenstra (1986) explains the interdependence of culture and communication in the following way:

Communication is essential to cultural activity since communication allows sharing. Although they are similar and interdependent, culture and communication are not identical. Culture is the larger term, which involves all of the activities of people within the created order, while communication is an essential activity deeply embedded in that process of cultural activity. Without communication, it would be impossible to be engaged with other people in cultural activity. Communication enables people to develop relationships and thus live in culture and do culture. (pp. 18–19)

Another important issue to take note of is the fact that cultural patterns influence how people communicate. Thus, culture affects how we think, talk and behave. For example, Western countries, which are generally individualistic in their cultural patterns, place a lot of emphasis on the individual. In a society with such a cultural orientation, speaking directly is the norm. However, in collectivistic cultures the emphasis is building connections between the individual and others. Greater emphasis and value is placed on building relationships. Therefore, indirect ways of communicating that maintains harmony are considered more desirable.

## Communication models and theories

The study of communication enables us to examine the specific social processes in which major symbolic forms are created, apprehended and used. To help us understand communication, scholars have developed models. McQuail and Windahl (1993) define a model as:

a consciously simplified description in graphic form of a piece of reality ... [that] seeks to show the main elements of any structure or process and the relationships between these elements. (p. 2)

Anderson and Ross (2002:69) also point out that a model of communication tries to simplify the complex interaction of various elements in order to explain relevant relations and possibly help predict outcomes. Models therefore serve as lenses through which we can see some aspects of the communication process. Human communication is complex; therefore models 'reflect increasingly sophisticated understandings of the communication process' (Wood 2011:16). However, these models present different ethical implications because they produce different forms of social relations.

Many models of communication dehumanise communication by scientifically reducing it to a mechanical process of sending

and receiving messages. James Carey (2009:27) argues that there is a derangement in our models of communication because of 'an obsessive commitment to a transmission view of communication'. Quentin Schultze (2000) also argues that, in adopting the transmission approach, scholars rob communication of its creativity and spiritual mystery. Therefore, some communication models offer a limited view of communication whilst others capture its essence better. For example, earlier models of communication depicted communication as a linear process in which one person transmits a message to another person. Communication was viewed primarily as information transfer. Wood (2011:18) states that the most accurate model of communication today 'represents it as a transactional process in which people interact with and through symbols over time to create meaning'. In the transactional process, all persons engaged in sending and receiving messages influence each other as they interact, and nonverbal feedback is an important source of information (Wenberg & Wilmot 1973; Andersen 1998).

Apart from developing models in order to help us understand communication, scholars also propound theories to describe and explain what happens when people interact with one another (Wood 2004). Theories attempt to describe and explain some aspect of human experience. They are abstractions that try to reduce experience into a set of categories. They are also constructions that scholars create to represent ways in which people see their environment (Littlejohn & Foss 2008). Communication theories give us important tools for understanding our daily lives and our relationship with others, explanations to help us understand communication, and ways in which communication shapes and reflects cultural values (Wood 2004; Littlejohn & Foss 2008). Theories also serve as lenses we can use to examine communication problems in different ways (Craig & Muller 2007).

The study of human communication by and large has developed within a European-American (North American) cultural framework with its attendant uncultural bias and ethnocentrism (Littlejohn 1996; Gordon 1998–1999; Yum 1988; Kim 1999; Kim & Leung 2000; Kincaid 1987). Kim (2002), for example, notes that the highly individualistic values of the United States are evident in many communication theories that have been developed and published. These communication theories are then exported to other societies and used to uncritically study communication processes in those societies with little regard to cultural influences. This suggests that the scientific study of human communication in Western countries has not been value-free. It has been greatly influenced by an individualistic ontology that permeates the theories and models of communication. There is presently an ethnocentric skewing of communication studies; however, non-western perspectives on human communication will at some time in the future help bring some balance to the discussion. Kim points out that if this does not happen, American communication research, for example, will remain blind to its culture-bound assumptions and limitations.

## A biblical foundation for communication

The following quotation from *Total truth: Liberating Christianity from its cultural captivity*, by Nancy Pearcey (2005), sets the stage for reflecting on a biblical foundation for communication:

Creation, Fall, and Redemption are not only the fundamental turning points of biblical history – they also function as marvellously useful diagnostic tools. A genuinely biblical theology must keep all three principles in careful balance: that all created reality comes from the hand of God and was originally and intrinsically good; that all is marred and corrupted by sin; yet that all is capable of being redeemed, restored, and transformed by God's grace. (p. 95)

These three principles also provide a way to overcome the secular and/or sacred dichotomy in our lives. The biblical message is not just about some isolated part of life labelled 'religion' or 'church life'. Creation, Fall and Redemption are cosmic in scope, describing the great events that shape the nature of all created reality. We do not need to accept an inner fragmentation between our faith and the rest of life. Instead we can be integrally related to God on all levels of our being; offering up everything we do in love and service to the glory of him (Pearcey 2005:95).

God created humans with the ability to communicate – with him and with other people – and to create and foster a sense of community. Quentin Schultze (2000:15) argues that 'God intends for all people to use the gift of communication to love God and neighbour; not just to exchange messages'. Communication therefore enables us to co-create cultures or ways of life.

God created the whole cosmos. 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Gn 1:1). According to Wolters (2004) God's created order also includes:

such human realities as families and other social institutions, the fact and appreciation of beauty in the world, the phenomena of tenderness and laughter, the ability to conceptualize and reason, the experience of joy and the sense of justice. (p. 5)

The worshippers in John's apocalyptic vision in the book of Revelation chant the following words:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. (Rv 4:11, NIV)

John Calvin (McNeill 2006) echoes this refrain when he said:

How can the thought of God penetrate your mind without your realizing immediately that, since you are his handiwork, you have been made over and bound to his command by right of creation, that you owe your life to him? – that whatever you undertake, whatever you do, ought to be ascribed to him? (p. 42)

## Created in the image of God

Genesis 1:27 in the Today's New International Version (TNIV) says: 'So God created human beings in his own image, in the

image of God he created them; male and female he created them'. God created man and woman in his own image and gave them the ability to communicate with him and with each other. The full and precise meaning of man being created in the image of God is 'cloaked in the very mystery which constitutes our being human' (Spykman 1992:223), as reflected in Psalm 139:13–18. There are also relatively few direct references in Scripture to the idea of the *imago Dei* [image of God]. However, the New Testament teaches the restoration of the image of God in Christ (Rm 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; Col 1:15; 3:10). Gordon Spykman (1992) explains that the idea of the *imago Dei* covers human nature in its totality and embraces all we are and have and do:

It refers to that network of religious relationships which constitutes the framework for covenantal obedience – our relationship to God which is decisive for the normed relationships which hold for our personal lives, for our life together in human communities, and also for our dealings with God's other creatures great and small within the cosmos as a whole. The idea of image refers to our status and task: We are not divine, but we are sacred. Human life is wholly sacred, because it is lived before the face of God. (p. 228)

Stuart Fowler (2005) also argues that the image is not something we possess; rather it is the whole person that is God's image. Another important biblical teaching related to the *imago Dei*, is the focus on the term 'heart'. The frequent use of 'heart' in Scripture is 'in connection with a person's basic religious orientation' (Henderson 2012:16). Spykman (1992) throws more light on this by explaining that:

the heart represents the unifying centre of man's entire existence, the spiritual concentration point of our total selfhood, the inner reflective core which sets the direction for all our life relationships. It is the wellspring of all our willing, thinking, feeling, acting, and every other life utterance. It is the fountainhead from which flows every movement of man's intellect, emotions, and will. (p. 218)

This understanding must help us learn to express our love for God through everything we do – from eating to drinking, involvement in our career, communing with God through prayer, acts of service to our fellow human beings, et cetera. (Fowler 2005). The Bible says: 'Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor 10:31, NIV). As imagers of God, we are called to reflect, echo and mirror his will in all that we do in life (Spykman 1992:226). Imaging God also means that we:

represent God, like an ambassador from a foreign country... [representing] the authority of God ... [seeking to] advance God's program for the world ... [and to] promote what God promotes. (Hoekema 1986:67–68)

We are created for a purpose. God has a task and a mission for us to pursue in order to fulfil our calling. As God's image bearers, we are cultural agents with the ability to carry on God's creative work through the cultural mandate (Romanowski 2007). God gave Adam and Eve the cultural mandate – to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and to be good stewards of his creation (Gn 1:28). According to Sinnema (2001), this implies that we are called to study, discover, interpret and theorise about the world and our life

in order to understand our place and calling in it. Therefore, studying and theorising about communication will enable us discover 'serviceable insights' to help us become good stewards of everything that God has entrusted to us.

## A high view of communication

God has endowed every Christian with special gifts 'to make a unique contribution to humanity's task of reversing the effects of the Fall and extending the Lordship of Christ in the world' (Pearcey 2005:129). This means that we must endeavour to teach every subject, including communication, in a way shaped by the message in the Bible (Marshall 1998). Pearcey concurs with Marshall when she says all academic subjects should be taught from 'a solidly biblical perspective so that students grasp the interconnections among the disciplines, discovering for themselves that all truth is God's truth' (Pearcey 2005:129). Communication and the Christian faith are not two separate realms that need to be integrated in order for us to teach communication from a biblical Christian perspective. What is important is that we need to discern, interpret and apply creational norms (Wolters 2005) as we study communication.

We need to have a high view of communication by trying to understand the process and the ways that communication influences people in ethically justifiable ways (Christians *et al.* 2012). A Christian view of ethics and communication, for example, is based on biblical principles and their application to the field of communication. This implies, for example, that because communication can influence the direction of a person's life, our communication should build others up according to their needs. The apostle Paul admonishes:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Eph 4:29, NIV)

Additionally, the following verses from the book of Proverbs, James and Colossians are equally instructive:

Sharp words cut like a sword, but words of wisdom heal. (Pr 12:18)

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. (Ja 1:26, NIV)

Let your speech at all times be gracious (pleasant and winsome), seasoned [as it were] with salt, [so that you may never be at a loss] to know how you ought to answer anyone [who puts a question to you]. (Col 4:6, Amplified Bible)

As noted above, God's original plan for humanity was that our communication would develop and expand our relationship and fellowship with him and with others. He also gave us this gift for creative and constructive purposes. However, because of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, communication in many situations is corrupted for destructive purposes. The fall into sin brought about a deviation from God's creational design and a distortion of his good design for every aspect of life. And, as Romanowski (2007) points out, the effects of sin therefore are not limited to the human heart; it encompasses culture, society and all of creation. Pearcey also underscores the fact that:

every aspect of human nature has been affected by the Fall, including our intellectual life – and thus every aspect needs to be redeemed. Nothing was left pristine and innocent. Even our minds are tempted to worship idols instead of the true God. (p. 93)

Spykman (1992) points out:

Sin can and did and still does distort our humanness, but it cannot destroy it. Implied in this viewpoint is the recognition of a rightful distinction between who we are structurally and directionally by virtue of creation, and who we now are as misdirected sinners. (p. 197)

Since the early history of humankind, we have embarked on and still carry out the cultural mandate as misdirected sinners. All that we create as we develop culture is marred by sin. The way we communicate, which is a product of our cultural upbringing, is equally distorted by sin. Quentin Schultze (2000) points out:

Sin fundamentally corrupts our ability to communicate ... Our alienation from God radically corrupts our ability to communicate in ways that promote God's peace and justice ... Unless we recognize the reality of sin, we will wrongly assume that all we need for better communication is a bit more common sense, greater education, or additional practice. We will act as if there is nothing fundamentally wrong with us. (p. 75)

The whole of the created order cries out for redemption, a renewal that will enable us to live according to God's original design. Sin has distorted our understanding and view of life, and perverted the relationship amongst and between people, creating communication challenges in every sphere of life and of human endeavour. As Cornelius Plantinga Jr (2002) also points out:

The real human predicament, as Scripture reveals, is that inexplicably, irrationally, we all keep living our lives against what's good for us. In what can only be called the mystery of iniquity, human beings from the time of Adam and Eve (and, before them, a certain number of angelic beings) have so often chosen to live against God, against each other, and against God's world. (p. 50)

The apostle Paul reminisces: 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time' (Rm 8:22, NIV). It is important to note that the Fall:

does not negate or abolish the original cultural mandate, even though this central human task to administer the potentials of the creation is now corrupted by sin, which has become part of the human condition in a fallen world. (Romanowski 2007:52)

The good news is that God made us for himself. So, our sense of who he is runs in us like a stream, even though we redirect it toward other objects (Plantinga 2002). We are created for meaningful relationship with God. Even in our rebellion against a holy God and his ordinances for all humanity, he still pursues us in love, in order to bring us back to himself. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been given direct access to God and we can re-establish communication with him. The redemptive work of Christ also made it possible to restore God's original intent for communication for all humanity.

With the preceding discussion as a backdrop, we will now look at how I approach the teaching of undergraduate communication studies.

## My teaching approach

I organise learning objectives for students under the following four related issues:

1. Religious Orientation
2. Creational Structure
3. Creational Development
4. Contemporary Response.

For *Religious Orientation* the objective is that students should be able to demonstrate a biblical understanding of the value of all human beings and their cultures. For *Creational Structure* they should understand the relationship between communication and culture and develop a biblical perspective of culture, cultural response and cross-cultural communication. For *Creational Development* they should gain a better understanding of how culture influences people's lives, describe the major challenges to cross-cultural communication and how to overcome them, and understand how different cultural values influence everyday communication. In *Contemporary Response* students should develop cultural sensitivity skills, demonstrate cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication competence, and develop a respectful attitude for the diverse ways of communicating in different cultural situations.

I subscribe to a Christian biblical worldview that sees life from a holistic perspective. God's kingdom and his rule encompass the whole of life; therefore there is no aspect of life that is separate from his sovereign rule. We, as his creatures, are servants and stewards of God's world. The concept of 'stewardship' should remind us of 'servanthood', or 'service', which is an important biblical motif. Van Dyk points out that one of the important dimensions of servanthood is stewardship or caretaking (caregiving). He further notes (Van Dyk 2000):

We are to take care of ourselves, of one another, and of the entire creation around us. [Therefore our] classroom should be a place where such stewardship is demonstrated and modelled and practiced. Stewardship is actually built into the creation, but distorted by sin. We were created to be caretakers. (p. 66)

As a Christian teacher, I strive to be a good steward of the time and creative abilities that God has given me. Likewise, I teach students to prepare for a life of stewardship in God's world. It starts with learning to properly use and manage time; not as a commodity or something that should control us, but as a gift that must be enjoyed and used responsibly.

As a teacher, I carry out my office in a responsible manner, which includes adequately preparing for classes and maintaining a lifestyle that models a true disciple of Christ. On the other hand, I also challenge individual students to take responsibility for their learning. My desire for students is that they take responsibility for their learning by being involved in the process; not only as individuals, but also as part of a community, because we are created to live in community. I therefore try to help my students develop a sense of community in the classroom as I guide them to learn. The concept of stewardship calls for both teachers and students



to care for one another in such a way that we challenge and encourage ourselves towards biblical excellence in all we do.

At the beginning of the semester, I inform students that I plan to use active learning in the classroom. I stress that we will all be involved in the learning process and it will be a collaborative, participatory process. As a community of learners, we should challenge and encourage one another to strive for the best in the learning process. My syllabi include various assignments that facilitate and promote active learning, as well as a schedule that shows what we will do on a weekly basis. Assignments are also designed to accommodate different learning styles and intellectual abilities. The assignments include chapter-reading responses, individual and group analysis of case studies, small group discussions, take-home reflective papers, and service-learning group projects. I therefore use multiple assessment systems and include the grading criteria for each assignment in the syllabus. Apart from the syllabus, I also have a plan for teaching that shows the instructional strategies I will use every day.

I encourage and challenge students to strive for the best and never be satisfied with mediocrity. I negotiate with them in order to modify class assignments to meet our learning goals. I endeavour to make every class session enjoyable and challenging. I create a climate of mutual respect and a caring attitude. At the beginning of my on-campus classes, I try to find out who is not present and whether those present know if any of their colleagues is absent because of ill health. I also invite individual students to my office to discuss their performance and ways they could improve. I regularly ask students for both written and oral feedback regarding activities that they find contributes to effective learning in the course I am teaching. I also ask for face-to-face feedback in the classroom, or one-to-one discussions in my office, or solicit information through emails.

## Creation-Fall-Redemption motif

No learning can be separated from faith, because faith is integral to all learning. Thus, all learning is based on some faith, either a formally religious faith or a secular faith (Marsden 2001:21). With this understanding, I approach my teaching of undergraduate communication from a biblical Christian worldview that uses pedagogy that is informed by Christian principles. As James Smith (2009:40) points out: 'behind every pedagogy is a philosophical anthropology, a model or picture of the human person'. Respect for all students is an underlying principle that guides the way I interact with students, either in my online or on-campus classes.

Nancy Pearcey (2005:127) suggests that the grid of Creation-Fall-Redemption provides 'the scaffolding for constructing a Christian perspective on any topic, along with a grid for analysing competing worldviews'. She also suggests three sets of questions for constructing a Christian perspective that I find very helpful (Pearcey 2005:128). They are:

- **Creation:** How was this aspect of the world originally created? What was its original nature and purpose?
- **Fall:** How has it been twisted and distorted by the Fall? How has it been corrupted by sin and false worldviews?
- **Redemption:** How can we bring this aspect of the world under the Lordship of Christ, restoring it to its original, created purpose?

Creation-Fall-Redemption is therefore a framework that shapes the following seven discussion questions I use at the beginning of my classes in communication:

- What was God's original intention or design for human communication when he created the world?
- What are the creationally normative principles for communication?
- How has God's purpose for communication been distorted by the effects of sin?
- What can we do to bring healing to the brokenness in human communication?
- What does it mean to treat communication with integrity, in accordance with God's original intention?
- How can we work to restore communication to the way it was meant to be in the beginning?
- What will communication look like when Jesus Christ returns and all things are made perfect?

These questions enable us to explore the subject of communication from a Christian perspective.

Creation-Fall-Redemption is a highly schematised version of the Bible's grand narrative. As Wolters (2004) notes:

[T]he Bible is the true story of the world, the grand historical narrative of an earth and a people formed in creation, deformed by human rebellion and reformed by God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ. It is the story of God's redeeming love for his wayward creation, the story that will culminate in the restoration of the entire creation under the gracious rule of God. (p. 10)

Everyone has a worldview – a comprehensive framework and philosophical perspective of the world that includes one's basic beliefs about things (Olthuis 1989; Wolters 2005). The word 'things' is used by Wolters (2005:2) to encompass belief in God, 'the world, human life in general, the meaning of suffering, the value of education, social morality, and the importance of the family'. The cultural environment we grow up in shapes our worldview. I subscribe to a Christian biblical worldview that sees life from a holistic perspective. In comparison to other worldviews, the biblical view of life is the most integrated, comprehensive and viable one because its point of certainty is in the infallible Word of God – the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Pearcey (2005:121) notes: '[The] Christian worldview alone offers a whole and integral truth. It is true not about only a limited aspect of reality but about total reality'. Sinnema (2001:202) also affirms that the biblical worldview provides the comprehensive framework for Christian thinking and action.

In order to teach communication from a biblical Christian perspective, we can use the framework of Creation-Fall-Redemption as a foundation (Jongsma 2007):

This compound motif captures the grand sweep and meaning of history, but it also provides us with important ideas about the underlying structure and purpose of the world that is historically unfolding, and it tells us about its relationship to God. (p. 24)

This approach enables us to look at phenomena through the corrective lens of Scripture. In the next section, I will describe how I use the components of this framework to teach communication.

## The motif of Creation and communication

There are two concepts that we focus on – *Creational Structure* and *Creational Development* of communication. In the creational structure of communication, we examine the nature of communication as God intended it. I emphasise in my teaching the fact that God created human beings with the ability to communicate – communication is God’s gift to humanity. Its purpose is to enable us to live in fellowship with God and other people, and to carry out the cultural mandate. For us to communicate meaningfully and effectively, we need to recognise God’s creational norms for communication. Biblical principles of communication should shape a normative understanding of the role and function of communication in human societies. I encourage students to use knowledge from other academic disciplines to understand the interdisciplinary nature of communication. For example, the study of intercultural communication or organisational communication should tap into the study of social anthropology, sociology, theology, management, organisational behaviour, and social psychology, to name just a few. In the creational development section of the framework, we examine various historical developments that have influenced and shaped the study of communication as an academic field.

## The motif of the Fall and communication

Adam and Eve’s fall into sin was so pervasive that it affected all of God’s creation. Sin affects our thinking, distorts our understanding and view of life, and also ruins and perverts the relationship amongst and between people. The effects of the Fall and of sin are amplified in all human societies. It literally affects our ability to manage every function that God has given for human life. It is instructive to know that ‘[e]ven though the effects of sin range widely, sin neither abolishes nor becomes identified with creation’ (Wolters 2005:57). Because of sin, creation is in conflict. This is not the norm. God created the world with the intention that every part of his creation would work in harmonious cooperation. Pearcey (2005) draws our attention to an important truth about human nature and the Fall. She notes that:

Christianity gives the basis for a higher view of human nature than any alternative worldview ... In the aftermath of the Fall, God gave verbal revelation to enable us to order our lives by timeless and universal truths. (p. 129)

## The motif of Redemption and communication

The redemption that Jesus Christ brings is comprehensive in scope, leaving no part of creation untouched. Restoration encompasses forgiveness of sins through Christ and restoration of our relationship with God and fellow human beings. This restoration then begins to transform all that we do as human beings, including the way we communicate and how we relate to the whole of creation. A spiritual warfare is going on where Christ seeks to reclaim all of creation from the enslaving rule of Satan. Wolters (2005) suggests that an important issue to remember as we engage in the cultural mandate is to discern structure and direction for all human phenomena. Thus, we need to identify, for example, what is creationally normative for communication and what is directionally a perversion of God’s creational design that must be corrected and restored through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. So, as Christians we are called to identify, affirm and support all phenomena or social institutions that are in line with God’s creational intent, but at the same time, correct and restore what is distorted and perverse.

## Contemporary response

When we become aware of what has happened to communication because of the Fall, as the redeemed of the Lord, we are called to respond to the challenges of life differently. In *Contemporary Response*, students learn how to be communicatively competent in different situations or contexts, including:

- interpersonal
- family
- intercultural
- organisational
- small group
- public speaking
- mass-mediated
- computer-mediated
- social media.

Good communication builds community and promotes unity in diversity. It treats people with respect and dignity and does not belittle or underrate them. Good communication is not monological, but dialogical. People are not passive recipients of information, but are rather actively involved in the whole process of communication. The transactional model discussed earlier in this article captures this dynamic. We need to recognise and affirm the creational structure of communication and reject the directional anomalies. The ability to communicate was created by God for a purpose and must be carried out for that purpose. Communication has a created structure or design (the way it was created). We need to engage the direction of human communication because it has been affected by the Fall. Direction refers to the movement toward or away from God or what God has created. We need to reclaim every area of life that has been affected by sin, for Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Communication influences the direction of people’s lives.

Therefore, norms for communication must enable us to determine whether a given communication process is right or wrong from an ethical basis and grounded in God's Word.

## Teaching the cross-cultural communication course

In this section, I will illustrate how I teach intercultural and cross-cultural communication from a Christian perspective. My goal is that the course will help students appreciate and celebrate cultural diversity, become communicatively competent in relating to people from different cultures and equip them for service.

My teaching of intercultural and cross-cultural communication is a journey into another culture that we are not familiar with. This journey ends as a journey into our own culture. As we embark on this journey, we do not lose sight of the fact that the study of cultures is actually the study of people in specific cultural contexts. It is important not to lose sight of the humanity at the core of the topic; to do so is to lose sight of something fundamentally important to understanding communication between people from different cultures (Ayee 2007):

It is easy to study culture and intercultural communication from a theoretical and abstract perspective that is technical and devoid of an awareness that we are dealing with human beings with personalities, feelings, histories, hurts, struggles, hopes and dreams. (p. 3)

In my classes, I underscore the fact that studying human cultures should expose us to knowledge that ultimately helps us understand those who are different from us. Curtis DeYoung (1995) suggests that:

by interacting with people of other cultures, we learn more about ourselves as humans ... as people who are created in the image of God, we gain a greater knowledge of our God when we understand the many cultural reflections of God's image. (p. 179)

Studying intercultural communication with an open mind and a genuine desire to know other people gives us an opportunity to witness and appreciate the rich diversity of humankind (Rothwell 2004:92).

Looking at culture and communication from a Christian perspective enables us to explore questions such as its religious direction, relativism in culture, whether all cultures are equally good, and to what extent we can evaluate elements of culture (Veenstra 1986). He suggests that:

even though the ways of living of one set of people may not be superior to the way of living of another set of people, we need to discern the religious direction of each culture within the larger picture of culture being for or against God. (p. 18)

Albert Wolters (2005) explains that:

direction ... designates the order of sin and redemption, the distortion or perversion of creation through the fall on the one hand and the redemption and restoration of creation in Christ on the other. Anything in creation can be directed either toward or away from God – that is, directed either in obedience or disobedience to his law. (p. 59)

The religious direction of various cultures help us identify how cultures express and portray the depravity and rebellion of human nature in different ways. Sadly, we recognise that the religious direction of all cultures by and large is not towards serving the one, triune God, revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. However, the religious direction of some subcultures, or co-cultures, reflect a search and a journey to discover what it truly means to live normatively according to God's standards for all of life.

In the cross-cultural communication course I teach, one of the early assignments requires students to write a two-page cultural autobiography. They describe their cultural background and upbringing and indicate how they think it affects their communication with both people from the same culture as themselves and those from other cultures. They often describe themselves as living in a 'bubble' and captives of their own culture who do not have cross-cultural or intercultural contact with others.

Teaching communication at some Christian universities and colleges in the United States made me aware that student interaction with people from other cultures is minimal. I encourage my students to be intentional in making people who are 'outsiders' and come from other cultures feel welcome amongst them. In a reflective paper I assigned in class, a 20-year-old undergraduate male student wrote the following<sup>1</sup>:

I think we should always strive to recognize that in each culture, indeed in all of creation, God has left his fingerprints among us. Diversity is a beautiful thing that we should learn to enjoy. Just like a wine connoisseur enjoys many different wines, we can enjoy the differences in humanity. Our uniqueness is not something to make us separate; it is something that unifies us as a member of humanity.' (Andy, male, undergraduate student)

A truly Christian education must be transformational. It enables students to be renewed in their minds as they acquire cognitive knowledge and critically reflect on it. This knowledge must in turn positively influence behavioural change. In the cross-cultural communication course, after we have discussed various different forms of prejudice, which include blatant prejudice, conceit, symbolic prejudice, tokenism and arm's length prejudice (Hall 2005), students write an application paper. The purpose of this paper is to encourage them to look at the issues of prejudice in their own life. For this assignment, students select one or two incidents from their own life in which prejudice or negative stereotyping was manifested. This experience involves them as the source (not the target) of the prejudice. They try to explain and better understand these incidents based on their knowledge of prejudice. The paper also includes a discussion of their own feelings and reflections on the event reported, as well as the implications it holds for other similar incidents and future interaction. The following are examples of what students wrote for this assignment and my comments. A student wrote:

<sup>1</sup>In order for the students to remain anonymous and to protect their identity their real names were not used.

'Much as I may try to hide it, I am prejudiced against some people. Prejudice prevents me from enjoying good relationship with people different from myself, and it paralyzes me with fear, when there is no reason for such fear. I need to recognize where I fall prey to negative stereotyping and where I display prejudice so that I can enjoy better relationship with people unlike myself.' (Jessica, female, undergraduate student)

The comment I wrote in response to what this student wrote was:

'It's important to realize that God's grace is sufficient for the challenges we face with race relations and cross-cultural communication. We live in a broken world, but we can be instruments in God's hand to bring healing and new life.'

Another 21-year-old female undergraduate student wrote the following:

'The reflection on prejudice in my life has opened my eyes. I was never aware of how prejudiced I was towards less intelligent people. I have been convicted of my sin and humbled by it. God has used this realization to push down my ego and get me back on track. While I may still struggle with the issue of my superiority over those I consider intellectually inferior, I am aware of it. This awareness will help me in future situations to accept others for who God has created them to be, and for all that they have to offer in His kingdom. Meanwhile, I will continue to pray for a renewed mind, a heart of acceptance, and forgiveness of my prejudice.' (Amanda, female, undergraduate student)

My comment in response to what this student wrote was:

'God wants to transform our motives, attitudes, beliefs, values, behavior, etc. Being transformed into the image of Christ is a process. Every now and then we will be exposed to situations which God will use to either convict us or to mold us. When we respond obediently to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we see change in our lives. Right here on earth now, we can experience a glimpse of what God has in store in the new heavens and the new earth – people from different cultures, born again of God's Spirit can love, respect, and enjoy each other as the redeemed of the Lord!'

In terms of contemporary response to the challenge of cross-cultural communication, it is refreshing to read some student comments. The following are all extracts from essays written by 19–21 year old male and female undergraduate students:

'Reflecting on the important place of narratives in helping us define culture, I wonder if children's stories about their own culture and other cultures would help to make them more sensitive to the cultural richness of our world ... Perhaps if we begun from an early age in celebrating the differences in cultures by sharing these narratives, children would not have to struggle to erase stereotypes of another culture that they have developed.' (Emily, female, undergraduate student)

'It was captivating for me to realize how much impact narratives have on my life even when I do not realize it ... When I learn how the world works, how God is working in it, and how creation is working for His purpose, I am able to grasp what my purpose is in this world and how I can live to further the work in His Kingdom. Likewise, when I evaluate what is going on in the world based on God's principles in the Bible, I am more aware of how I should be living according to His Word.' (David, male, undergraduate student)

'A rainbow of cultures and people inhabit this earth and despite increasing globalization racism pervades the church.

Communities shiver at the word racism, but it is important to understand that our visions of the Bible may be developed out of an attitude of ethnocentricity. Perhaps, each of us is hiding from the radical statement that the Bible makes with its references to a multicultural world. Understanding the cultures represented in the Bible gives me a responsibility to seek out ways to pass this treasure on to those around me, especially the children. As I work to pass on the rainbow images in scripture I also must begin to lay the ethnocentricity and racism that pervades my life at the foot of the cross so it too can be part of my story of salvation.' (Andrew, male, undergraduate student)

'This semester has been a journey of growth for me in cross-cultural communication. I have learned many things about how to interact with people of other cultures by better understanding where they come from and understanding how I can connect with them in a way that expresses my desire to love them and my desire to communicate with them effectively. As I reflect on my time in this course, I think that it has given me an opportunity to look at the process of communication and use it to show other people that I love them in Christ and take a genuine interest in their lives.' (Beatrice, female, undergraduate student)

'I have learned how to identify discrimination and hypocrisy in my own life when I try to accuse others of being prejudiced. My own tendencies are to be much the same way, and that's troubling, yet I can identify these thoughts more clearly in my own mind and use the skills that I've learned to combat these sinful tendencies.' (Steve, male, undergraduate student)

'This class has been one of the best for me this semester. I have taken a lot of useful knowledge from this class. The tools that I gained and the new ways in which I view people will positively affect my actions for the rest of my life.' (Lillian, female, undergraduate student)

'The cross-cultural communication course has been an absolute eye-opening experience for me. I never expected to gain so much insight into the cultures of different people. My view of others has definitely changed from what I learned growing up. Before I took this course I did have a touch of racism in me. This course has helped me to become a better cross-cultural communicator; not because it has taught me how to communicate, but more because it has made me want to communicate. It has shown me that even when two people do not speak the same language that they can connect with each other and can learn from each other.' (Paul, male, undergraduate student)

By teaching communication from a Christian perspective, I am able to encourage and challenge students to discover their purpose and calling in life. The following quote from the late J. Gresham Machen, the American Presbyterian theologian and Professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary, is instructive:

For Christians to influence the world with the truth of God's Word requires the recovery of the great Reformation doctrine of vocation. Christians are called to God's service not only in church professions but also in every secular calling. The task of restoring truth to the culture depends largely on our laypeople. To bring back truth, on a practical level, the church must encourage Christians to ... be not merely consumers of culture but makers of culture. The church needs to cultivate Christian artists, musicians, novelists, filmmakers, journalists, attorneys, teachers, scientists, business executives, and the like, teaching its laypeople the sense in which every secular vocation – including, above all, the callings of husband, wife, and parent – is a sphere of Christian ministry, a way of serving God and neighbor

that is grounded in God's truth. Christian laypeople must be encouraged to be leaders in their fields, rather than eager-to-please followers, working from the assumptions of their biblical worldview, not the vapid clichés of pop culture. (Goodreads 2013)

## An integrated life

Following the earlier rumination on communication, integration of faith and learning, implies an active and concrete expression of our faith in every aspect of life. It involves living out in practical ways what we claim to know cognitively and what we know experientially through the things we do. Fowler (2001) explains that the Bible shows continuity between our *knowing* and our *doing*. Therefore, we must see the limits and fallibility of all human knowledge. In light of this, having an integrated perspective between faith and learning is not the goal; an integrated life is the goal (Opitz & Melleby 2007). We should not divorce the Christian faith and biblical principles from anything we do. The Word of God has norms and principles that are universally applicable and good for all people, irrespective of their culture. Thus, the Christian worldview should be foundational to any discussion on integrating the Christian faith in communication.

For those who hold a Christian worldview, the process of integration must involve deliberately and consciously allowing the Christian faith to permeate and transform the way we think, the way we see the world, how we interpret reality and how we conduct our lives. It must be a Christian perspective to understanding God's world, and his order and standard for things and for our lives. In short, our thinking, our attitudes, and our behaviour patterns must be informed and transformed by biblical Christianity, which is radical in its calling and scope. Integration should enable us to relate our faith to life; building connections between everything we do, including how we communicate.

We cannot compartmentalise life by putting, for example, the way we communicate in our family and professional life in one box, and the way we carry out 'spiritual' disciplines (such as prayer, fasting, Bible studies, life in church, etc.) in another box. To do this is to fall into the trap of dualism, where we deny the lordship of Christ over every area of life. Dualism is alien to the unity of God's truth. It is a false dichotomy to try to compartmentalise faith and learning. From a biblical point of view, faith should not be separate and private and viewed as an add-on to learning. This is a dualistic mentality that is alien to the Scriptures. Our Christian faith has everything to do with how we live and carry out day-to-day activities. There should be no separation between sacred and secular – all of life must come under the sovereign rule of God. We must live *coram Deo* [live daily before the face of God].

A proper integration of our Christian faith in the way we communicate in different contexts will give us the opportunity to build community, promote unity in diversity, as well as develop and maintain good social policies. It will also enable us to learn how to treat people with respect and

dignity. Effective communication promotes dialogue; it helps us to actively listen to others, to empathise and to work for *shalom*. From this perspective, people are not passive recipients of information, but are rather actively involved in the whole process of communication.

Integration of the Christian faith in communication must be undertaken in an intentional, serious and authentic way. Through human communication, both face-to-face and through the electronic media, we should expose and shed light on the truth of God in relation to every aspect of life. In our interpersonal interactions and public speaking engagements, we can communicate and tell redemptive stories that focus on and explore the human condition. We can tell stories of heroism, struggle and deliverance, hate and love, suffering and endurance, joy and triumph – stories about God's grace and hope for humanity. Telling the stories of people's lives using different channels must be done within normative boundaries that help us see the goodness and mercy of a holy and loving God who desires the best for his creation. As said in 1 Corinthians 10:31: 'So then, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you may do, do all for the honour and glory of God.' All that we do must be done to the glory of God.

As far as communication is concerned, the issue of integration of faith and learning should encompass what we teach (content), how we teach that content (pedagogy) and how what we teach impacts the way we think, what we believe and how we live (our character). Therefore, we should work towards integrating not only faith and learning, but also faith and learning with living.

## Called to make a difference

It is imperative that we discern the spirit of the age and the deceptions that could make us blind to the radical call to daily repentance, renewal and transformation (Hughes 2005):

The truth is, the gospel is a radical message. It is radical in its call for discipleship and radical in its promise of grace. But grace apart from discipleship can be 'cheap,' and discipleship apart from grace can quickly degenerate into legalism. (p. 128)

Jesus Christ makes an absolute claim on every area of our lives. Like Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), I also believe that a revitalised Christianity demands not only a renewed church, but also a renewed Christian presence in every area of life (Walsh & Chaplin 1983). This is a call to a truly biblical understanding of God and his claim on our lives. The lament below painfully draws attention to the existence of a cancerous situation that we must acknowledge and deal with:

We have turned to a God that we can use rather than to a God we must obey; we have turned to a God who will fulfill our needs rather than to a God before whom we must surrender our rights to ourselves. He is a God *for* us, for our satisfaction – not because we have learned to think of him in this way through Christ but because we have learned to think of him this way through the marketplace. In the marketplace, everything is for us, for our pleasure, for our satisfaction, and we have come to assume that it must be so in the church as well. And so we transform the

God of mercy into a God who is at our mercy. We imagine that he is benign, that he will acquiesce as we toy with his reality and co-opt him in the promotion of our ventures and careers. (Wells 1995:114)

The searching light of God's Word shines on the darkness in our lives and challenges the consumerist mentality that many people have adopted and succumbed to. Christian reflection on communication therefore must be approached from a pragmatic standpoint. I want to reflect for a moment on two images, salt and light, to illustrate the importance of the role of Christians in the world. In Matthew 5:13–16 (NIV) Jesus said:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Mt 5:13–16, NIV)

Just as salt is used as a preservative to prevent the decay of food, Christians can be prophetic voices that call the world back to obedience to God's ordinances for human beings and society at large. Through communication, we can *protect* and *preserve* what is still good, so that it does not decay. We can demonstrate and point out the radical nature of the gospel for the whole of life. For example, we can ask questions and show the world what being truly human is – what marriage and family life, school, business, or the state should look like according to God's intentions (Van der Walt 2007). We need to critically look at our culture from a biblical Christian perspective in order to identify and retain what is good, but reject what is out of line with God's standards. We cannot influence or impact our culture if we withdraw from various artistic and cultural activities. We need to keep abreast with developments in our culture, engage the culture, and work towards its transformation as we allow the light of the gospel to shine and impact it through contextualised, redemptive, artistic, creative works.

When our Christian faith is integrated in how we live and communicate, we can positively influence and impact people through the values of God's eternal kingdom. However, we cannot be light in a dark world in our own strength or in our own power. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can be salt and light. Life in a postmodern world with all the advances in technologies of communication and styles of relationships has made 'people hungry for intimacy and authenticity but more fearful than ever of phoniness' (Guinness 2010:225). The Holy Spirit will enable us to preserve, to reconcile, and to point people to Jesus Christ, who alone gives meaning where there is no meaning, and hope where people have lost hope.

## Conclusion

As Christians, we are called to live lives that reflect the values of God's kingdom in the classroom, our personal lives, family life, in the workplace, in our relationships, and in all other spheres of life. Through communication, we are able to

interact and relate with others. Appreciating a person who has done a good job by saying 'thank you', or following up on a colleague who is not feeling well, are concrete expressions of meaningful communication behaviour that speak volumes. Integrating our Christian faith in communication enables us to be a testimony to others. The danger of compromising and rejecting the authority of God's Word for all of life has always been there throughout the history of the Church, but it looms even larger in our time.

For us to communicate meaningfully and effectively, we need to recognise God's creational norms concerning communication. Biblical principles of communication should also shape a normative understanding of the role and function of communication in human societies. We should use the ability to communicate to work for the establishment of God's kingdom and to look forward to that day when:

[A]ll of culture and society, yes, all of creation, will be made new, when as in the apostle John's great vision, God's dwelling is with humanity and God tenderly wipes each tear from every eye. (Zuidervaart 1995:22)

It will be the day when we can join with the saints of all ages, including the Apostle John who wrote:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (Rv 21:3, NIV)

Finally, the following old, but timeless, vision of Rudyard Kipling (2006) will not be lost on any of us – it will come alive:

When Earth's last picture is painted and the tubes are twisted and dried,  
When the oldest colours have faded, and the youngest critic has died,  
We shall rest, and, faith, we shall need it – lie down for an aeon or two,  
Till the Master of All Good Workmen shall put us to work anew!  
And those that were good shall be happy; they shall sit in a golden chair;  
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas with brushes of comets' hair.  
They shall find real saints to draw from – Magdalene, Peter and Paul;  
They shall work for an age at a sitting and never be tired at all!  
And only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master shall blame;  
And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame,  
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star,  
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They Are! (p. 181)

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