

## Book Review

### J. N. Manokaran, *Christ, Culture and Communication*

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#### Introduction

Dr. J. N. Manokaran is one of the most intelligent scholars who has emerged from Indian soil, a mission giant and contemporary scholar who knows where to aim and how to convey thoughts and ideas. The author has successfully penned down the challenge of today's Christendom, where one needs to understand why communication is so important. In this journey of Manokaran's study, one will find various principles conveyed together with the book's structure—yet the book is quite readable, allowing its readers to keep pondering and improving.

There are 17 chapters in this book that deals with the fundamental need for communication. The author wisely separates phantom communication from real relational communication. Each chapter deals with one basic principle that can make one a wise communicator.

#### Key Ideas

The preface gives the solemn idea about the author's intention and the epilogue reviews his work of excellence, where he appeals for a new paradigm shift in today's local churches. Though the book has 17 chapters that systematically convey Manokaran's foundational principles, I would like to condense these wisely crafted chapters by summing them up under three key themes: Christ, culture, and communication. The book presents these themes in a different order to constructive effect.

#### Communication

The first few chapters give enough understanding and basics for communication. The well-crafted definition of communication not only appeals to its readers to improve but also presses quite hard to learn suggested innovative methods to be an effective communicator. While defining communication the author gives four basic aspects of communication: *the sharing of information, based on relationships, based on common location and interest, and the expression of deep intimate sharing.*

While taking readers into in-depth communication, the author develops systematic dynamics to help one to know the biblical understanding of communication. Why communication is so fundamental in mission, ministry, discipleship, and today's local churches is also discussed. At one point the author challenges readers with the question, "What can a dumb, deaf, and blind lion do?" Our quality of communication needs to be improved if we call ourselves, "Witness."

A vitally important summary statement of this section is, "Great Commission is Great Communication of the gospel" (19).

#### Culture (Community)

The author is very intelligent in dealing with the challenges of culture. One cannot separate communication from cultural context. What forms a community are its communication and

language. One needs to be able to communicate within a cultural context in order to share Christ with the people. In some chapters, the author raises some strong arguments and helps readers to acknowledge that we seldom care about presenting Christ to a variety of cultures around us. A variety of diseases and a variety of remedies are discussed in the middle portion of this book. The author appeals to the urgency to communicate Christ to these cultures in a systematic and better way. Every cross-culture mission should be deeply rooted in the existing culture being evangelized. The ways of contextualization and use of various methods while communicating with different cultures are the backbone of this book. *The author develops a systematic practical theology of communicating Christ for the book's readers.* He suggests the need and means of communicating with people in various cultures, including orality, radio and TV, mobile phones, the digital world as a new opportunity, and today's challenging context.

The key summarizing statements in this instance are, "Each context has its own culture. Hence, communication must be using culture as means to communicate and not see as a barrier to be demolished"; and, "Culture is like glasses through which people see and interpret experiences and generate behaviour" (97).

### **Christ**

The center of our history and interpretation of communication or theology is *Christ*. Christ needs to be known and made known to all through our communication and culture. Regarding God as the central Communicator, the author brings out the point that God is the one who initiates communication: he is the originator and sustainer of our communication. Of special importance is how, *in chapters 5 (73) and 13 (215), the author gives typology and redemptive analogy, helping readers to ponder Christ as God's way of communicating with us. The author brilliantly brings out the point that the typology is for Jews whereas the redemptive analogy is for non-Jews, i.e., Gentiles. Konark Temple and the Ambala Amid War (218, 219) are some of the outstanding examples of analogy and contextualization.*

### **Personal Response**

God is active in communication, one cannot separate communication from Scripture, theology is what we have understood about God, and Scripture is God's word. In short, when we analyze the need for communication in respective cultures, the ultimate goal is to make Christ known.

Theological interpretation of communication, as with the Christian life more generally, has a past, a present, and a future orientation. Communication is an activity in which the words of Scripture are not simply recounted, but are made present in the immediate context. Theological communication or common communication is not owned by the academy: it is a practice sustained by the life and worship of the church.

C. S. Lewis tells us that we can rightly judge something only when we know what it is, what it is intended to do, and how it is meant to be used. Our aim of communication must line up with its purpose.

I have come to realize that one of the major crises of many contemporary interpretations of Scripture is the failure of communicating Christ to all ages, to all tribes, and all people. If communication has to be effective, it cannot be a static stereotype: it has to be dynamic.

Communication is a life-giving principle that applies to people, systems, and even written texts. Changing circumstances and new contexts always require different answers, fresh solutions, and new approaches. Through the process of transformation, new life energizes existing systems, people, cultures, texts, and contexts.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Hearty Congratulations to Dr. J.N. Manokaran as an author, minister, mentor, and missionary who knows Indian soil, who has experienced the fragments, pieces, and troubles of life, and has been through pain and agony—but has not been stopped by them. The book in this regard is highly valuable and important as this discloses the author's quality of work, dedication, research, and experience.

The author has removed the barriers and limitations in our communication. He provides the way for fresh understanding and a new shift that demands urgency and adaptability in communicating Christ in cultures. The role of an effective communicator is to reveal, disclose, relate, and share intimate transparency of truth which is made known to us by the Word and the world. One needs to study this book to be reminded and constructively troubled to become an effective communicator.