

## **PROPHETIC ROLE FOR COMMUNICATION**

By Professor Musimbi Kanyoro

Communication begins with the encounter between community and God and that prophecy is the voice, the message of hope and salvation which God provides to an ever needy community.

The Christian Church has inherited aspects of the prophetic tradition and therefore it needs to be reminded of its prophetic call and the risks involved in the response. Prophets were not entrepreneurs who chose careers as God's spokespersons but, rather, they were persons called by God to speak difficult words. Furthermore, the message of the prophets was intended not to inform but to transform.

A response to the prophetic call and action demands a shift from the security of a known world of orderliness, its recognisable debates and rules of the profession. Prophetic call places one in an environment where there is far less certainty or ordinary source of sustenance; it places one in a kind of wilderness. A wilderness where the hope and courage to continue depend on God's promise for restoration of the order and for bringing justice for those to whom it is due. The journey of the prophetic call is a wilderness because it encounters dissension and dispute all the way, even as it was for the people of Israel. The risks to the prophetic call are more apparent than the gains.

### **Biblical prophets as models**

The Christian Church acknowledges mostly the prophets whose names are synonymous with the prophetic books of the Bible. The Bible also makes a distinction between true and false prophets. Those who are often referred to as false prophets are temple and court prophets who always spoke positive words, had comfortable jobs with monetary benefits. They had wide support from the people for their favourable prophecies, which ensured no troubled consciences.

In contrast, those we consider today as true prophets usually criticised the authorities, government, religious practices and sometimes the people's lifestyles and insisted that unless there was change, God would bring punishment to the whole community. Their criticisms were out step with the norm. They were lonely voices in the wilderness.

Prophetic communication needs to take into account that there is a need for self-examination and accountability even of the Church itself. Perhaps, that is where the beginning should be. Indeed, the church is called to proclaim God's judgements on all that apposes God's way of justice and fullness of life; but it also requires judgement for its own participation in the conditions that create brokenness. Silence of the Church in the face of those screaming for help is nothing other than disobedience to God and to the prophetic call of the Christian community.

### **Women's movements as models of prophecy and communication**

Empowering people or communities is not sending something that needs to be done from without. Examples from many movements of the people show that, in many instances, people's weaknesses turn into strengths. Women's movements are a good example in this regard because these movements rose out women's desire to restore the sense of mutual respect for all people.

For Christian women, the Bible provided the model. The hymn of creation in the Bible tells of all life as the gift and work of God. The existence of life itself is a sign of God's creative love. Women and men are created in the image of God and invited to take part in the caring responsibility of all other created life. Christian women have from time to time asked, how on earth women came to be regarded as being inferior and subordinate to men?

In the journey to restoring this God-given order, women have experienced many hardships. Many have rejected by their families, churches and society; others have given up on themselves and on God. Yet there are many who stay and join in the cry of the Saviour on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Women experience hardships in society under the heavy burden of culture and tradition, violence at work places and in the home; girls experience hardships in education patterns which favour boys. Women and girls experience rape and social stigma of being discriminated against by society. Women cry with creation as modern science exploits their bodies in millions of ways. Our societies are judged today because of discrimination, subordination, exploitation and oppression by sectors of our communities. These situations have made women support one another. Women gather in their neighbourhoods to discuss their welfare.

Perhaps it is time for the churches to recognise the women's movements as a prophetic sign because women can offer role models for prophetic communication within the Christian community. Giving women their rightful place in the decision-making bodies of society and church will enable them to make their contributions alongside with men so that the world can experience the power of a new community, where all are respected and experience a life of togetherness.

### **The communication challenge**

The prophetic call of communication should be understood from the point of view of content rather than structures; people rather than technology; justice rather than ability. The prophetic action of Christian communities lies in its efforts to sustain life and bring justice to God's world. Christian communication is also called to challenge the power structures in communication in order to find a breakthrough, which will give voice to the powerless. The Christian Church must at this time in history feel challenged to give every support possible to Christian communication bodies, especially those trying to give an answer to a prophetic call.