

SERMON TO THE FELLOWSHIP OF ALL SAINTS

CATHEDRAL, NAKASERO

'POSITIVE USE OF THE MEDIA'

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A few weeks ago I told a congregation, while teaching on the Mountain of the Media, that had the human incarnation of our Saviour been in this generation, the Lord Jesus Christ would have been tweeting/using Twitter as part of His earthly ministry. Some people could not comprehend that, but that is part of what we shall discuss today in trying to understand the overarching phenomenon of the Media for us Christians.

The Media, in its simplest contemporary understanding can be defined as the main means of mass communication (broadcasting, publishing, and the Internet) regarded collectively. There have also been different forms of media for communication at different stages of human history, as we shall see shortly. The Media has also been described as the Fourth Estate, the first three estates being the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary. This makes the media fairly important in everyday life, and much more so from the spiritual side as we shall see shortly.

Psalms are scriptural instruction to those who wish to have access to God at His temple; it describes those who are acceptable to the Lord. In all the 150 psalms (of which David wrote about a half), the most frequent weapon used against the psalmists was the tongue. It was the psalmists' experience that the tongue is as deadly as the sword (Psalm 57:4, and 64:3-4).

From our understanding of scripture we can see that the Lord God is reflected in these estates: the Executive (He is King), the Legislature (He is the Lawgiver), and the Judiciary (He is Judge). How about the Media? The Media's main channel of communication, and we know that Jesus' Very Essence: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1).

God's plan for media is to provide a meaningful **link** between Executive (King), Legislature (Law Giver), and Judiciary (Judge) – and with society at large, which is why it is referred to as the Fourth Estate, though with less prominence. In ancient Bible times, this would accommodate particularly the offices of apostle (think Paul's ministry and all the epistles he wrote), of prophet (the pronouncements that Isaiah or Ezekiel made), and evangelist (John the Baptist's ministry). For these to be effective, they needed media.

I submit that the Lord is a giver of information – the final thing the Lord Jesus Christ did was to delegate us the Great Commission, which would be greatly enhanced by the application of Media, as we have seen over 2,000 years.

The fulfilment of the Great Commission consists in the telling of the Gospel – Gospel means Good News. We are to tell good news. In the same way that a King/President/Prime Minister dispenses his power and authority shapes the nation that he/she leads; the same way that the laws a Parliament/ Legislature passes define a country; the same way that the Judiciary dispenses justice judiciously or injudiciously tells of equity, is the same way that the state of the media can define and direct a nation. It is often said that the media sets the agenda.

Thus if the media highlights violence, a society is likely embrace violence (US mass shootings self-enhancing); if it promotes gay rights, the homosexuals will be emboldened; if it exalts riches of corrupt people, hard work as a discipline may be undermined.

Power of Words: God imbued the Word with so much power it even brought the world into being:

- a. Genesis 1:3 "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light."
- b. Psalm 33:6 "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth"
- c. Psalm 107:20 "He sent out His word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave."

We see from these passages that God's Word is His powerful self-expression in creation, wisdom, revelation, and salvation. God's original plan for the word,

as expressed in whichever medium, was the power **to make, to create, to bless, to redeem**. This is God's original plan for the Media.

Ten years ago, I would have been sharing this message with fellow professionals in the media industry. Today, the media has been democratised by social media – Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, short message/sms services and the mere existence of email services. I and my fellow professionals no longer have the monopoly to break news, broadcast photographs and videos, or comment on political issues – all you guys are media people.

This new reality makes it all the more critical that we understand how and why we must use the media positively – because of the power and prevalence of social media, we are now all purveyors of information. When social media first happened upon us, it promised greater enlightenment, with accurate information and effortless communication. But we all know that that has not exactly happened because many untruths are being spread – there are lies, lots of bad faith, much scandal, etc. To truly use the media well, let us know what we are purveying: we must be informed. How do we get informed? By reading good, wholesome books, listening to verified news (particularly credible news organisations etc). I get frustrated when I receive social media forwards of false information or outdated news. (Australia Prime Minister Julia Bishop has said this is the policy for Muslim migrants). But Julia Bishop was not the sitting Prime Minister at that point - she had been in office about three premierships earlier – this was like saying “Ugandan President Godfrey Binaisa has said.....” Before we forward social media information, let us be certain that it is accurate and up to date.

On October 20, I received a WhatsApp message from a pastor in Kampala: *“Please pray urgent prayer request. ISIS militants have just taken over Quaragosh, the biggest Christian city in Iraq. There are hundreds of men, women and children that are being beheaded. Please take one minute to pray for them. Pass the message cross all your contacts so that the prayer chain will not be broken....”*

Now if we were well-informed about what was actually happening we would have known that in October, ISIS had been pushed out of its last stronghold in

Iraq. Think of all the energy that was expended praying into this!!! Oh that you could be praying fervently into an issue that the Lord answered long ago! Is this not wasted prayer?

Mandatory forwards: “Pass this to 10 people....” Should we not leave it to the discretion of the receiver to either pass on or trash? Demanding that the recipient should pass on to a specific number of people is emotional blackmail, especially to the superstitious type (who are many. Nowhere does scripture require us to “pass on the message to 10 or 20 people”. After all we have freedom in Christ – not even salvation was forced on us! The one command we know is the Great Commission, to make disciples of NATIONS, not 10 people.

Apart from content, it is how we use social media – we are always scrolling, clicking and sharing. All the time: in church, in cars, at dinner, in meetings, even in the bathroom! Church – can we leave phones outside? *The Economist* Nov 4-10 quotes report that users in rich countries touch their phone **2,600** times a day! How does your Bible study compare with your consumption of social media?

How Would Jesus Tweet?

Media is principally the platform through which messages or information are relayed. Media evolves with time. Some forms of Media over the Millennia:

- When God wanted to pass on to us, through Israel, His firstborn nation, He communicated through His prophet Moses with instructions written on the two tablets of the Testimony (Exodus 32:15-16) (not I-Pads or Galaxy tablets) c.1446 BC
- God wanted to alert Pharaoh to socio-economic catastrophe that would befall Egypt, He used dreams that Joseph would interpret (Genesis 41); similarly Nebuchadnezzar, with Daniel interpreting (Daniel chapters 4 & 7)
- When Jesus pronounced His Mission Statement, scripture tells us in Luke 4:17-20 that He took the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, unrolled it, and read from it. c.29 AD
- We saw true mass media happen in the years 1450 to 1550 when the Holy Spirit laid the different but convergent burdens on a handful of His

children. First, in Germany, He gave wisdom to a 'mulokole' called Mr Guttenberg to invent the printing press. Then He convicted a priest, the Rev. Martin Luther, that there were many divine truths that the Church was mishandling, and Luther hammered those 95 these on the church door at Wittenberg in October 1517, marking the beginning of the Reformation. The Holy Spirit then raised some of the Reformation's key individuals in England, including King James, who sponsored the publication of the Bible, the mass-produced KJV, and Mr William Tyndale, who translated the Bible from little-spoken languages to universally spoken and available language.

- Invention of television, radio, internet, computers, mobile phones, the Internet in 20th century
- Social Media in the 21st century

So the media is a form – it is how you use it that matters. The message is the key thing – we should not say that social media is an evil; it is how people employ it and what they put on it that can render it evil.

We have a **biblical model** of how best to do Media. Angel Gabriel is one of only two archangels named in scripture. He is what you can call Heaven's minister of Information (the other archangel is Michael, who is the minister of Defence). That only two are mentioned reflects the importance of information in the Heavenly Realm (and by extension the premium Heaven places on spiritual warfare, Michael's ministry).

Angels are messengers of God, familiar with Him face to face, and of an order of being higher than man. Angels are spiritual beings separate from God, yet, unless they be fallen, are of unquestioned integrity, goodwill and obedience to God (1 Samuel 29:9 "Achish answered, 'I know that you have been pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God'." 2 Samuel 14:17 "May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil").

7 attributes of Archangel Gabriel (was sent on many divine missions – chief angels positioned before God's Throne *Psalms 15*):

1. Explained many things to Daniel many things (Daniel 8:16-26) Lesson → **fluency**, as Gabriel was fluent – proper English or Luganda or French...
2. Gave prophecy of 70 weeks (Daniel 9:21-27). Lesson → **be edifying** (i.e. don't gossip in idle manner. Ephesians 4:29 "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.")
3. Brought reproach to Zechariah ("I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you..." Luke 1:19). Lesson → **be confident**;
4. Know **what** you are purveying ("Therefore what I speak is true" verse 19)
5. For **whom** ("...in the presence of God...")
6. What **purpose** ("....to **tell** good news)
7. Broke good news to Mary (Luke 1:26-38). Lesson → **Bear** (passing on/forwarding tweets, messages etc) **good news** ('How lovely on the mountain are the feet of him who brings good news' Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15)

Final Warning: Social media leaves a trail that people (potential marriage partners, potential employers, potential clients) can pick up and follow. One can lose a job or a spouse. We have to mind the content and the frequency of our use of social media.

In Conclusion: Media is good! But there are two challenges:

1. Message – wrong messages are put in the media
2. Usage – when social media platforms and their devices, like phones, become idols.

Ends