**Toward an Alternative Prophetic Ministry
and Effective Media Usage in an Age of Globalization**

Nam Joong Kim

This research essay aims to provide a critical theological reflection on the role of high technology media, focusing its content and prophetic message, articulated through worship and preaching in an age of globalization. This essay's main purpose suggests that high technology multimedia and its contents should always be directed to prophetic ministry, which places itself on the cutting edge of what is just and what is unjust in local communities, nations, and the world in an age of globalization. For this reason, in this essay, I critically observe the content of the media, used in the context of worship and preaching. I then suggest alternatives for prophetic ministry and appropriate media usage possibilities as theological and ecclesiological tasks of the churches in an age of globalization so that the alternative prophetic ministry and supplemental media usage, which I suggest should be interwoven, make communities of faith and preachers participate with the one God who is judging, restoring, suffering, delivering, transforming all humans and creatures, all worlds, and all life.

I. About Media Contents in the Context of Worship and Preaching

Without doubt, we are immersed in multimedia in all aspects of our lives. Multimedia images shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Multimedia stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. Multimedia spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence, and who is not. We can also be intentionally/unintentionally brainwashed by the media which conveys symbols, language, images, and interpretation, produced by the anonymous/invisible dominant group. Therefore it is very important to recognize how to understand, interpret, and criticize the meanings and messages conveyed through multimedia images and contents.

The contexts of worship and preaching are no exception. In her book *Worshiping Women*, Heather Murray Elkin claims that "female breasts, which were nursing images from the natural world, no longer function as primary religious symbols of food in this media culture, [constructed by a capitalistic consumer society.] Both food and body are products for Market, not religious."[1] Thus she questions, in contemporary media culture and churches that are "over-stimulated by sexual imagery," whether or not "a woman's body can communicate sacramental meaning, can mean a human body, and can interpret our bodies as signs of all that is holy and human."[2]

In his doctoral dissertation, James A. Fenimore also observes how American mainline churches have adopted digital display technologies from Evangelical churches as a "technological fix" to solve the problem of declining membership. However, he claims that,

---

[1] Heather Murray Elkins, Worshiping Women: Re-forming God's People for Praise (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 63.

[2] Ibid.

because of differences in liturgical practices and theological understandings, mainline churches consequentially failed to increase the church membership. American mainline churches successfully imported high digital technology from Evangelical churches, but they must create their own media contents supporting their worship and preaching, based on their theology and confession of faith, but they also regretfully imported the media contents, which may cause acrimonious arguments of gender issues, from Evangelical churches without deep theological/liturgical consideration. For this reason, Fenimore reviews that American mainline churches have faced the often serious theological and liturgical conflicts that the content may undermine or be contrary to their theology and confession of faith.[3]

In particular, in the case of South Korea, I observe that the militaristic trend to express the vision of the gospel in terms of *victory* strongly influences the media contents of the churches. The phenomenon has existed on the South Korean peninsula since the 1945 Liberation of Korea. Language and imagery, reflecting such as the mission/prayer *strategy*, the Lord's *command*, a special early-morning prayer meeting for Jericho castle's *depression*, *conquest*, *attack*, *soldiers* of the Lord, and the evangelism *explosion*, have been supported by militaristic terms as well as media titles and contents. Likewise, Korean church worship and preaching has intentionally/unintentionally produced media contents which convey military-centered features, images, expressions, symbols, and icons. In this respect, Korean church's mission attitude tends to be militarily offensive/defensive and aggressive. According to statistics, more than eighty percent of Korean Christians are conservative-minded people who insist on the supernatural origin of Christianity, believe that non-Christian cultures should be converted to Christianity, and think that the military term, *conquest*, is the only proper term to describe the perceived relationship between the gospel and culture.

Korean conservative Christianity has made a grave mistake by not being able to lead a creative culture of mutual cooperation but rather, views treating other religions and cultures merely as *enemies* to be destroyed. Even today, there are conservative Christians who create disturbances in society by shouting, "If you believe in Jesus, you will go to Heaven. If you don't, you will end up in Hell." For this offensive mission, military-oriented media contents have been produced in Korean conservative churches. In addition to that, in this military-centered media church, the order of rank of the military has also been settled over that of the clergy. Therefore, the relationship of a senior pastor, assistant pastor, elder, deacon, and deaconess has represented the structure of a hierarchical system, not a partnership.

Likewise, churches not only use high technology media, but they also produce intentional media contents such as movie clips, symbols, language, and images, based on their own theological understandings and confessions of faith, which function to positively/negatively generate powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in the faithful. Media contents surely have had imminent impacts on the faithful's lives and ways of knowing/thinking/believing, and have exerted its authority on the congregants' lives throughout history.

II. Toward an Alternative Prophetic Ministry and Effective Media Usage

The main purpose and goal of prophetic ministry is to inclusively focus on the world and serve the world for God's purpose: to stand in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, to

---

[3] James A. Fenimore, "High-Tech Worship: Digital Display Technologies and Protestant Liturgical Practice in the U.S." Ph.D. diss., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 2009.

advocate for justice, and to speak the truth in love. In Walter Brueggemann's view, "prophetic [ministry] fundamentally consist of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people sense their own history in the light of God's freedom and his will for justice."[4] In this respect, the community of faith prophetically should restore/reconstruct media contents, which are influenced by the secular values of greed, competition, and self-interest. In addition, the church should re-produce alternative media content for the world while discerning the authentic worldview of contemporary culture, while seriously carrying out cultural analysis or critical thinking, being able to determine how the mandate for compassion and reconciliation critiques cultural values as well as knowing the biblical worldview. It is very important for the faithful to engage conscious and critical theological reflection on circumstances and media that are presently occurring in the contemporary social/global world from the perspective of God's purpose. If communities of faith ignore the social/global locations of their religious communities and the conditions of the particular social and cultural context, their confessions of faith and media contents, which are used by the faithful, will be a very superficial sophisticated instruction from a religious text and medium without any application whatsoever. If preachers also separate their sermons and media contents, supporting their sermons, from the concrete issues of their living contexts, the sermon then will be simply abstract information to be processed.

There is no doubt that the Word and Table in worship are the principal media which convey the gospel of Christianity. In particular, preaching has been an important medium, which greatly influences the faith formation and practical lives of Christians, of communication of the Word of God. It has functioned as an essential medium which delivers the Word of God to all Christian believers throughout the world. Karl Barth, the great German theologian, who was one of the first to speak out against the rise of Hitler in Germany in the early 1930s, commented that "every day you wake up, you should have the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other hand, so that you can be informed about what's happening in the world and pray accordingly."[5] In this sense, communities of faith and preachers should always look at the world around them. They must see and hear clearly the causes of the evil of today's world in an age of globalization. Why do these evil phenomena take place? What are the root causes of these tragedies? It is the boundless greed for material wealth which enslaves the hearts of us all. Worship and preaching, as a prophetic ministry, should be alternative media that witness the horrible consequences of the greed in the lives of many power holders. High technology media and its contents should also be supported for this witness, mission, and ministry.

First and foremost, the church should be able to see through the evilness of the capitalistic consumption culture which gave birth to global conflicts among nations. The Church should reject/deconstruct the system of greed and power which even uses religions to achieve its goal. As the disciples of Jesus, preachers and community of faith need to seek to transform not only the world but also the Church, as it is mired in a fundamental and recurring crisis in ecclesial identity and mission. Preachers and communities of faith should also make it, as Jesus Christ did, raising their voices proclaiming the impending judgment of history, while urging the people of the world to more away from the paths of destruction. That should be the intention and goal for prophetic ministry of the preachers and communities of faith while using and re-

---

[4] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 110. According to Brueggemann,"The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us." 13.

[5] Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), ix.

producing/constructing alternative media contents. As Peter C. Hodgson defines, both heavenly powers (ideologies: racism, sexism, classism, naturism, homophobia, xenophobia) and earthly powers (injustice: political, social, economic, and environmental oppression) can be appropriate topics/objects of alternative media contents as structures of evil or structures of destruction for prophetic ministry.[6]

Prophetic ministry is not a new task. I am convinced that it should be ongoing priority in the field of ministry, practically, in the midst of an ongoing process of development in the world, especially amidst the struggles and problems that emerge in the context of globalization. For the purpose of this prophetic ministry, alternative media contents should be re-produced and high digital technology media should also be supported so as to make possible the opportunity for prophetic voices to transcend racial, ethnic, and national boundaries enabling collaborative ministry on a global level. By doing so, long-standing socio-economic and political dilemmas and stalemates can be tackled via collective voices that have been brought through the high digital technology options. Despite the complexities that a globalized era generates due to cultural disparities, prophetic voices that gather to minister collaboratively are the hope of our digitalized world.

---

[6] Peter C. Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville. KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 225-230.