

Fijian Studies

A Journal of Contemporary Fiji

Vol. 14 No. 1 **Special Issue** on History: Fact, Fiction, & Factions May 2016

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When no one is left to tell the story,
would there be no history?

On History:
Fact,
Fiction,
&
Factions

Dialogue

On Open Letter:
Message for World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2015

James Bhagwan (Rev.)

Dear Journalists, Media Practitioners and Communicators,

I write to you as a brother communicator to extend warmest greetings for World Press Freedom Day. As this special day falls on a Sunday I also write from a pastoral perspective to encourage you all to use this day to recommit yourselves to this important vocation.

I refer to journalism and communication as a vocation rather than just a profession, because often it is your passion for the truth, the passion to share the voices of the voiceless, that drives you forward in a very difficult media environment. In an age where blogs and social media posts drive society's conversations, and following a period of the greatest media repression in our nation's history, where journalism was been strangled by intimidation and draconian legislation, the challenge to speak truth – the full truth - and articulate the voices of the often marginalised is stronger than ever.

Speaking truth to any power structure and speaking on behalf of the silenced is a prophetic role. From the Christian perspective, the prophetic task of watching and warning comes from the prophet Ezekiel who was charged by God to be a watchman for the house of Israel (Ez 3:17). This entailed warning the society and dissuading it from being wicked (Ez 3:18-19). The major difference in the two types of watching is that the prophet is called to watch society on behalf of God while the News Media is empowered by society to watch it. So while this 'watching' task is similar in both cases, they differ in for whom the task is performed.

The prophetic nature of journalists and the News Media can be seen from the perspective of a searcher and communicator of truth in society without fear or favour.

The truth gives joy. It can also hurt. But the truth must be told.

Hence the truth is prophetic. So when the News Media reveal the truth it has a prophetic voice in society. The News Media need reporters and journalists who are committed to finding and reporting the truth.

In order for journalism to thrive, there is a need to transform the previously understood role of journalists as watchdog, to that of enabler; from commentator to communicator; from promoting debate to promoting dialogue; exploring the complexity of a situation rather than looking at the basic 'facts'; and letting the public rather than the newsroom set the agenda with the views of ordinary women, men, children, the disabled and minority groups being taken into consideration.

As a Christian communicator, I believe that communication is a spiritual exercise, while builds and shapes community, enhances participation, promotes freedom and demands accountability, celebrates cultural diversity, builds connectedness, affirms justice and challenges injustice. More than ever, there is a need for development journalism, and conflict-oriented journalism to be transformed into peace journalism. Peace journalism is not peace activism but strives to make peace perspectives visible.

Peace Journalism implies the ethics of consequence and action rather than that of intent and conviction. In terms of balance and objectivity, Peace Journalism defines balance as meaning attention to all goals of all parties, people as well as elites, in all phases of a conflict. Objectivity on the other hand refers to issue of the whole truth in order to avoid propaganda.

This is done by discussing the 'ethic of intervention' within the cycle of violence for physical, political and psychological security. As we continue our journey towards a peaceful and just society, peace journalism is part of an interwoven process at all levels of society.

Merely reporting the facts of a story is incomplete journalism. Journalists need to understand the connections between themselves, the sources they use, the stories they cover and the impact of their reporting. Now, perhaps more than ever, your role in informing, shaping and conscientization of Fijians is critical in our nation's journey.

Seek the deeper story, amplify the voices of the unheard and remain true to your calling – whether out of professional integrity, a sense of vocation or as part of your faith journey.

My prayers and the prayers of all who rely on your truth-telling are with you.

Yours in Peace,

James Bhagwan (Rev.)

Communicator

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