

Media Must Consciously Carry Out Their Responsibility to Deliver Truth

Marivir R. Montebon

December 13, 2018



New York City – In this digital age, media must consciously carry out their responsibility "to deliver truthful and transformative news and to speak truth to power" and veer away from political propaganda and fake news. Three interfaith theologians and a lawyer stressed this necessity during the media-UTS conversation sponsored by the Interfaith Youth Dinner Dialogue (IYDD) on December 3.

A vibrant and deep dialogue on truth and interfaith took place in the Oak Room of the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) that meant to put some sense in today's noisy, oftentimes blurry messages in the mainstream and social media.

The panelists were Dr. Charles Chesnavage, Dr. Andrew Wilson, Dr. Lounne Rouse, and Lara Gregory, Esq. Moderating the panel was UTS student Marivir Montebon who also represented the [OSM! online magazine](#) and the [Fil-Am Press Club](#) of New York.

Who controls media controls the message

[Dr. Charles Chesnavage](#), the first speaker, highlighted the increasing control of media in the hands of a few big businesses. In the pre-World War II era there were 50 corporations in control of media, which narrowed to six by 2000.

"A free press is a sign of democracy. But because it is in the hands of the few, democracy is endangered. The media becomes a propaganda machine that inflames hatred, like the case in Rwanda, or during World War II, it became a mouthpiece for pro-fascist rhetoric. Today, we see the emergence of fake news or alternative facts," said Chesnavage, a UTS professor.

[Dr. Andrew Wilson](#) reiterated the point that Chesnavage made by saying that the mainstream media has delivered a lot of propaganda and misleading reports that have become politically divisive, or have maintained the narrow parochialism of different religions.

Wilson is the Director of Scriptural Research and Professor of Scriptural Studies at UTS. He authored a book titled "[World Scriptures: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts](#)" which an extraordinary journey through the sacred writings of the world's great religions.

The Interfaith community

Pastoral care and counseling professor, [Dr. Lounne Rouse](#), for his part, cited the challenge for the media to report the truth at all times, in that it "should be transformative in the right direction."

He continued, "Reporters must make sure that they are gathering facts and reporting them as they are, instead of making an opinion. Reportage must be motivational too, so that it moves people to act responsibly.

"Maleaka Queano, a participant in the forum, said that on the ground, there had been several activities where interfaith collaboration has occurred, especially on immigration issues but were not actually covered by media.

"We go to rallies or prison camps in order to support people who have immigration issues which involve various religious groups and people of color. But this does not land in the news pages," she said.

Chesnavage responded by saying that there may be "outrage fatigue" on the ground which could have caused non-reportage of political actions.

Montebon, for her part, said that interest groups need to be specific in their messages in calling for political action by the public or officials, instead of continuously throwing around propaganda lines. "Messages must be specific and calls to action; that is the way to land in the news," she said.

Wilson added that in this digital age, the interfaith community needs to rethink ways to be covered by media in order to put forward a message of unity and understanding.

Speaking the truth to power

Lara Gregory, an attorney, meanwhile, said that it has always been a challenge for media to speak truth to power, citing cases of beleaguered Turkish journalists and Rappler, a Philippine online magazine, which has continuously reported on the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines in the time of President Duterte.

"The media is for the governed, and not the governors," she said, quoting one Supreme Court decision in favor of the New York Times in releasing a news report regarding the Vietnam war.

Gregory, a Philosophy graduate and Manhattan-based immigration and Supreme Court lawyer, cited that communities in New York have always been an expression of interfaith and cultural diversity, with Queens accounting for the most diverse of social groups.

New York is an interfaith community where cohabitation, tolerance, and hospitality exist, each individual has the responsibility to serve the community and to think critically instead of simply accepting what media has reported, said Gregory.