

Communications—The Ultimate Power

ARCH L. MADSEN

Thank you, President Oaks. This is a far cry from the old College Hall, where we used to have our devotionals when I attempted to attend this institution. I am deeply honored to be asked to occupy this brief time with you this morning. Truly there is no spot on earth with more significance for me than this campus, and there's no group of people for whom I have greater admiration and respect than those who lead this institution and carry forward its great works. I am grateful for the beautiful prayer—I need it—and for that lovely music.

When asked how he came to choose his special branch of scientific research, George Washington Carver, the famous Negro scientist, said:

When I was a child I would rise early in the morning and walk in the woods marveling at nature. I prayed and asked the Lord to reveal to me all the wonders of his universe. And although I continued to walk and to study, to pray, no great flash of understanding came to me. Finally, in desperation, I pleaded, "Lord, if you can't reveal all knowledge to me, at least help me to know some little thing—even the lowly peanut."

Well, the Lord answered me on that one. He said, "Now, George, you're getting down to your size."

In all modesty and humility, with due appreciation to a great man—Dr. Carver—I would like to state that the Lord has not challenged us with a peanut.

In spite of the fact that I am fully aware of the meaning of the statement that "the greatest vice is shallowness," I have the audacity this morning in this brief moment of time to title this discussion "The Ultimate Power." (The priesthood of our Heavenly Father, the organizations of the gospel, I preclude from this definition.) The ultimate power is not atomic energy nor gold nor money nor military might nor great industrial machinery nor great hordes of people. The ultimate power, my brothers and sisters, with which we deal—all of us deal—is called "mass communications." It is indeed a proper subject for this campus, above all campuses I know of, because you who operate it, have more of value to communicate to the world than anyone else I know. The world has more urgent need of what you have than any other institution of higher learning in all the world.

Arch L. Madsen was the president of Bonneville International Corporation when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 1 July 1975.

This ultimate power—mass communications—consists of three divisions, in my mind. I divide it into (1) facilities, (2) abilities, (3) motivations. Let's talk briefly about each of these points.

Communications Facilities

In our country we live in the millennium of communications technology. We have a glittering toolbox of communications instruments unequaled in all human history. But we live bordering the Dark Ages in our utilization of these marvelous instruments to communicate the basic value structure of an enlightened and wholesome civilization. Let's start with the facilities. We'll divide this into two sections: transmitting and receiving. To transmit, just in the United States alone we have over 1,700 daily newspapers, over 9,000 weekly newspapers, nearly 8,000 radio stations, 1,000 television stations, thousands and thousands of different types of magazines. We have books in abundance never before dreamed of—over \$2.5 billion spent last year for them—and printing presses capable of spewing out thousands of books per hour. We have satellites; we have microwaves, cables, laser beams. Indeed we do have a glittering toolbox beyond imagination for transmitting.

The receiving side is equal in stature. In the United States we buy over 65 million newspapers a day. We have in our homes and automobiles over 350 million operating radios, and we bought over 35 million new ones last year. The average person listens to a radio over two hours a day. We have over 110 million operating television sets; 40 percent of our homes have over two sets. Last year we bought over 15 million new television sets, and in the average home this instrument is used over six hours a day. The average child in the United States spends 242 minutes daily in front of a television screen. We have utilization of these instruments beyond my comprehension, even though I've spent over 40 years in this business.

Our tools for receiving communications are marvelous, indeed.

Communications Abilities

Now the second element of communications—the abilities. We have proven our ability to transmit and receive effectively entertainment knowledge of all kinds into the human brain through devices our ancestors could not imagine. Many gifted and dedicated people possess the "know-how" to utilize our great machines of communication to transmit types of material capable of attracting large audiences and to hold their attention for unbelievable amounts of time. Dr. David M. Blank, director of research for CBS, Incorporated, tells us that on the average each of us has about 2,600 hours of leisure time per year. Of those hours nearly 1,800 are spent with the radio and television, some 400 hours in reading. I emphasize that we have the abilities to transmit and to receive many types of entertainment and information that generate large audiences and consume much of their time.

We do know how to sell products and services and how to communicate all types of ideas, both good and ill, via these marvelous tools. But there are other types of materials equally or more important to our society that we seemingly do not know how to effectively transmit or receive or both—areas of vital subject material where we attract only small segments of our population as audience and in which only the very few seem to find any interest. This is the focus of my remarks today, for as I mentioned a few moments ago we do live in the millennium of communications technology. We do have a glittering toolbox of communications instruments unequaled in all human history, but we do live bordering the Dark Ages in our utilization of these marvelous instruments to communicate the basic value structure of an enlightened civilization. Some explanations for this strange paradox will be found in what I term the third element of

this ultimate power we call mass communications—motivation.

Communications Motivations

The third category—motivation in transmitting and receiving—is where we really reach the core of this ultimate power. We are financially motivated! The advertising profession in the United States alone this year will take in over \$25 billion in revenue. That's a substantial sum of money. We're motivated to use these tools for financial gain, and well we should be within reason. We're also motivated to use these instruments for political purposes throughout the world. It's our privilege to work internationally with many countries. What a great blessing it is to have the freedoms we still enjoy—even though they seem to be evaporating rapidly. The uses of mass communications for political purposes has been illustrated so forcefully in modern history. All of us should be familiar with the fantastic work of Joseph Paul Goebbels and recognize how his influence is still felt throughout the world. We should know how he studied our techniques of mass communications in this country and distorted them and perverted them so effectively in taking a very intelligent nation to destruction. More recently in history, our adversaries in Vietnam won from us a tragic military victory—our nation provided military resources ten times greater than those of our adversaries in that battle. Our defeat in that sorrowful event came, in my opinion, because we were out-communicated. (May I add a footnote here. In my opinion our adversaries of the collectivist world are our superiors in communicating the significant, basic values they believe in. In their efforts to triumph over us they seem to understand and utilize the power of mass communication better than we do.)

Undoubtedly our greatest challenge is to prepare effective programs dealing with the significant—and to discover how to motivate people to listen and view such programs.

When we attempt to present programs that are beneficial, people shut off their sets because unfortunately to understand the significant world around us requires us to think. Some social scientists tell us that the average person is not capable of dealing with the significant. If that is so, it places an even greater responsibility upon you who have come to this institution. Your presence here is evidence of your ability to think and your concern with the basic values of human existence. In this area of communicating significant values, many people are deeply concerned. Dr. Frank Stanton, former president of CBS, Inc., and a great leader in mass communications, commenting about the development of the first telstar, said, "Unless the satellite is used to link minds in a significant way, it is utterly useless." No one could have said it better. For our complex, confused, intense world (our Heavenly Father's great schoolroom) requires us to match our fantastic machinery of communications with our superb talents and abilities and to deal with the significant issues and values of our day.

Our day is not so much different from that of our ancestors, going back through recorded history. How impressed I am with a communication from the Old Testament prophet Hosea, who lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel 750 years before the birth of our Savior. He recorded what must have been a deep ache in his heart, saying, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). So it is today in our world. What a travesty it is that, with all these marvelous communications instruments Heavenly Father has given us, we have to admit such is happening to us! We, too, are threatened by destruction for lack of knowledge! Unfortunately, we have overemphasized the development of the tools of communication, and we have failed to recognize the near vacuum of our abilities or our motivations to utilize these tools.

The Challenges of Morality and Freedom

In the brief time we have, let's be specific in highlighting a few areas of special importance. Our moral climate seems to be in rapid decay—most thinking people are concerned about it. Things are falling apart in many ways. We claim to be a Judeo-Christian nation, whatever that means. Actually we are a nation of religious illiterates. Dr. Gallup tells us that 67 percent of the adults in the United States cannot name the first four books of the New Testament, that 54 percent cannot even give you the name of one of the first four books of the New Testament, that less than 20 percent of the adults in the United States can give you the name of an Old Testament prophet. Surely our communication system has the power to correct this most serious deficiency. Look at our escalating crime rate, our drug problems, hideous as they are, with alcohol and its slaughter on our highways alone. We're ineffectual in communicating solutions. There are problems of divorce and the need for more effective educational programs. These are only a few of the problems which are damning the human family and where we lack the ability to communicate helpful solutions.

We're not motivated, it appears, either in transmitting or in receiving, to destroy the curse of economic illiteracy that plagues our nation. Luther Hodges—former secretary of commerce under President Kennedy, former governor of the state of North Carolina, former president of Rotary International—in a scathing attack on our economic ignorance states that “only one adult in twenty in the United State of America knows enough about our economic system to vote intelligently.” In fact, he said, “We are a nation of economic boobs.” We are locked in mortal warfare with a counter economic system which seeks to destroy us and which is making immense headway all around us in the world and in our own country as well because of our economic illiteracy. The current serious economic situation we face—we watch the news

flow through our radio and TV facilities. We're stunned because those who would lead us in Washington and other places seem to be masters of obfuscation and stifle us with much heat and little light. There's practically no light at all being cast, and we see evidences of tragic distortions. Do we know what causes inflation, truly? Dollar devaluation? Productivity? Our energy crisis? How ridiculous is it that 68 percent of the people in the United States believe that the oil companies have caused the energy crisis. That is only one of many, many fallacies we could mention. How ridiculous to watch the environmentalists block our development of our energy. I was in the White House recently for a briefing, along with eighteen other broadcasters, and Secretary Morton tried to explain to us why our energy situation today is actually worse than it was when the oil embargo was imposed. Our government people apparently aren't interested in or capable of communicating the facts to us, or else we're not interested in or capable of receiving them, because he made a startling statement. He said that the development of energy in this nation is effectively paralyzed by the legal actions of the environmentalists. We're getting no place. Imagine blocking off-shore drilling! Seventeen thousand off-shore wells have been drilled, with only four major spills in all that record, and yet you'd think that the entire ocean had been covered with oil. These are tragic facts, my brothers and sisters, and they apply to the gospel of Jesus Christ because economic freedom is an integral part of it.

Our competitive enterprise system in the United States is now considered by some to be a controversial matter insofar as radio and television are concerned. Some tell us we cannot release items over the air defending our competitive free-enterprise system unless we find someone to speak equal time against it. Can you imagine that? Truly we can be destroyed; we are being destroyed for lack of knowledge, and that's why you on this campus are more

important than any other group on the face of this earth.

I wish all of you could have sat with me when for nearly an hour in one of our Inter-American Association of Broadcasters board of directors meetings, I watched a man who formerly operated successful television and radio stations throughout Cuba. This man, my old friends of many years, asked for the microphone to be placed on the table, sat before us, and took off his coat. I didn't understand why he wanted to sit down but I soon did. For over forty-five minutes he poured out all the anguish I've ever heard come out of a human soul. He soaked the front of his shirt with his tears as he told us how he, because of apathy, had permitted freedom to be destroyed in his great land. He didn't care about what it did to him, he said, "but what I did to my children and my children's children—this most precious of all gifts." Do we feel that strongly about freedom? Again, I repeat, you have more to communicate of the significant in basic human values than any other installation or institution of higher learning in the world. The world desperately needs to know the value structure found on this campus, which is based on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Communication of the Gospel Message

The Lord has made very plain to us what he expects us to do. I suppose each of us looks at the scriptures from the particular field in which he spends most of his time. The Lord has told us many times specifically what he wants us to do about our knowledge. He said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). What a profound challenge! I call your attention to one simple word—*so*. He didn't say, "Let your light shine before men"; he said, "Let it *so* shine before men that they will see your good works." What does that mean? It means that he's telling us to be effective in our

communications of the applications of his truth. What have you done? You have special opportunities, and so do I. Those of us in broadcasting have frightening opportunities when we realize the millions of people we reach. Some of the things we're very happy about, such as the fact that tens of millions of people in Latin America know about Brigham Young University because your basketball games are televised on seventy-six stations throughout that continent. Yes, we have special opportunities to *so* shine. We have magnificent opportunities to be that light upon the hill that he asked us all to be. I also tell you it's humbling and frightening to a degree I cannot describe.

I'm pleased to give you a brief report of our team that we have in the Bonneville operation. We attempt to put that light upon a hill and to *so* shine about the good works that always follow those who attempt to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. I would like to preface this portion of my remarks with a thought contained in an ancient Arabic legend about a spindly sparrow lying on its back in the middle of the road. A horseman came by, dismounted, and asked why the sparrow was lying upside down.

Replied the sparrow, "I heard the heavens were going to fall today."

"Oh," said the horseman, "and I supposed you think your puny little bird legs can hold up the universe."

Replied the sparrow, "One does what one can." That's the way we feel: We do what we can. That's the challenge to each of us, isn't it?

May I show you two things that have happened that are very pleasing to us. A Gabriel is the highest award given by the Catholic Church for excellence in communications. My wife, Peg, and I had the opportunity of stopping off at a university campus in Detroit less than a month ago and receiving, not one of these, but two of the twenty Gabriel awards given for outstanding broadcasting excellence in the United States. We made a clean sweep of

the top awards for public service, both radio and television. But this is recognition from our peers that perhaps our works are worthy—praiseworthy, to some degree. We hope they are. We humbly acknowledge the blessings of our Heavenly Father in our feeble efforts to work in broadcasting. And we pray with all our hearts that in some small way these works may glorify our Father which is in heaven. Now, that is one award. Just a week or ten days ago came another. This is called the “Clio.” It is the highest award given by the Association of National Advertisers—most of the big companies in this country. It is given for excellence in many categories, and this represents the highest award given—the sweepstake award—for public service broadcasting. It was given to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for radio and television programming prepared under contract by Bonneville. This is a trophy—an emblem that we are very proud to have won. We hope that it serves as a spur for more.

Each of us must do the best he can in the areas where he operates. But truly the “ultimate power” the mass media are waiting for is the graduates from this institution to come and show them how to communicate more effectively light and truth on the significant elements of the human experience. Truly the world is waiting for the rays of that light the Lord has asked us to put upon the hill. The world is waiting for us to *so* shine that all people may understand the priceless gospel of Jesus Christ! Millions are diligently groping in search of answers. You in this room and on this campus have more answers than any other group of people in this whole world.p

In concluding, I would like to repeat the words of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. I’ve mentioned them on this campus on prior occasions, and they are so appropriate:

Do you say, “There is nothing I can do about the problems of this world—nothing?” This is a common mistake, for there isn’t a single world problem that does not begin right where you are. And always you can diminish or add to it. Not to be aware of this, not knowing the difference you make, is in itself one of the biggest of all world problems. We are the descendants of great men who recognize their obligations to fight ignorance, poverty, and oppression everywhere. We must do no less, for we are the generation to whom greatness of heritage and opportunity have been given, so each of us faces these questions: How shall we pass on this heritage? How will it be diminished, or will it be increased? Will we be the grandparents or only the grandchildren of great men?

How effectively we utilize the “ultimate power” of mass communications will determine in large measure the answers to these questions.

Our knowledge and our skills and our attitudes should go toward heeding the words of the Lord that we are a light upon a hill, and we should *so* shine that others, seeing our good works, will glorify him. May all of us be diligent in learning and applying and communicating the precious truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ in all we do, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen