

The Problem of Facebook - Part I

1. Introduction

- Facebook is a global social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves.
- Additionally, users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region. The website's name stems from the colloquial name of books given at the start of the academic year by university administrations with the intention of helping students get to know each other better.
- Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook with his college roommates and fellow computer science students Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes while he was a student at Harvard University. The website's membership was initially limited to Harvard students, but was expanded to other colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, and Stanford University. It later expanded further to include any university student, then high school students, and, finally, to anyone aged 13 and over. The website currently has more than 300 million active users worldwide.
- Facebook has met with some controversy. It has been blocked intermittently in several countries including Syria, China and Iran, although Iran later unblocked Facebook in 2009. It has also been banned at many places of work to discourage employees from wasting time using the service.
- Privacy has also been an issue, and it has been compromised several times.
- A January 2009 Compete.com study has ranked Facebook as the most used social network by worldwide monthly active users, followed by MySpace.
- Facebook's mission is to "give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Millions of people use Facebook everyday to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet."
- There are many social networking sites, such as MySpace, Twitter, and LinkedIn, but Facebook is perhaps the potentially most damaging and dangerous in the sense that it allows photos and videos.

- What is the problem with Facebook? Although Facebook is not a sin and it may have good intentions, it does way more harm than good and is impossible to control what your friends put on it. The end result of Facebook is that inappropriate pictures get posted on one's account or on the account of one of the friends. It also results in a total invasion and loss of privacy. It can be the source of a major stumbling block in the spiritual life of others especially when servants use Facebook inappropriately. It ruins the image of the role model, and it can easily lead others away from God.

2. What Bishop Youssef says about Facebook

- “Here is my take on facebook and this type of media. Everything we do has a pro and a con. Every tool God has given us can be used for good and can be used for evil. These tools have the potential to build and the potential to destroy. This is fairly true in just about anything in life: television, money, education, cars, computers, medicines, and even talents. It is important that Sunday school lessons are not just lectures packed with information, but that they are also interactive, applicable, and encourage critical thinking skills. Why is it so important that everyone knows everything about someone? This baffles me about facebook. Privacy means nothing! What goes on a facebook page today maybe be damaging to the same person many years from now, when they are parents, executives, judges, diplomats, politicians, perhaps even priests, or wives of priests. No one knows the future except God.

The reason facebook is controversial is because it contains a major negative component. While you mentioned many positive aspects, one cannot ignore the impact of the lack of discernment of many people who naively succumb to inappropriate behaviors, comments, photos, language, attire, expressions, etc. Many young people, especially in the middle school teen years, have been cyber-bullied and harassed through these types of means. Rumors and gossip have found a new way to spread. As servants, we are accountable for what we are teaching and more importantly, what this teaching looks like when it goes into effect. Many people say that the reason they have facebook is for announcements, events, etc., but I don't think that is the main pull. The main fascination seems to be with the pictures that are posted. People have shown up on facebook never knowing that the picture someone took was for this purpose. There is no control or respect of anyone's privacy. Although many of these photos may be innocent and taken with good intentions, there is a strange obsession

with this kind of media. Servants in the church are public figures. Each servant has to decide for him/herself what stance they want to take regarding this matter. Each one should be aware of their own “private” behavior so that it is not contradictory to their public persona. If they make a mistake and repent, God will forgive them. What about the possibility of negative influence they may have had on someone else? How will that get rectified? If a servant choose to have facebook, it must be very well monitored. Otherwise, they should get rid of it altogether. One of the reasons we place young servants with this age group is because they can easily become role models for them and provide them with a wholesome and genuine sense of identity. I am not completely against facebook, etc., but I don’t find it as valuable as other use of media.” “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:13).

- “First of all, servants should not think or feel that their service is isolated to a particular class, area, or event. We are a church community, a church family. Whatever we do in a particular service will somehow impact another area and another person, etc. The parents of the children in the Sunday school classes also need to be served to some extent by their children’s servants. Having said that, it is important to begin by establishing some kind of rapport with those parents, so they do not feel threatened. The dynamics of the current situation is steered by fear and the unknown, especially if the parents are newcomers or immigrated as adults. Sometimes they become quickly overwhelmed by the all the negative images and things they hear about in this extra liberal society. With the best of intentions, they exert a tremendous amount of effort trying to protect their children. The result is they over-shelter them to a fault and isolate them from what they believe is mass corruption in society that is foreign to their understanding of child rearing. In reality, neither extreme of being too permissive nor too restrictive is healthy. Raising spirituality in children so that the children can grow to be spiritual adults requires balance.

Effective communication on the part of the servants is imperative. Visitations to the home help to facilitate this dialog. The servant’s purpose for communicating with the parents or visiting them should not be for the sole purpose of persuading them that they are wrong and that they should just let the children attend the church activities. The servants along with the priest must first discuss the pressing matters at hand and scrutinize the behaviors of concern. A thorough analysis of the problem should

be investigated. Do these problems of which the parents are complaining really exist? If they do, a plan of action needs to be implemented to remedy the problem. Then, when the visitation is made and the issues of concern arise, the servants can with a clear conscience assure the parents that their concerns have been taken seriously and a plan is in effect. If the investigation reveals there are no issues and the parents' concerns are unwarranted, then perhaps the priest can sit with the servants and the parents for reassurance.

If the immediate issue is the matter of the servants using facebook and that it would somehow have a negative impact on their children, the servants can grant them access to their own accounts and even show them what is on their page. Here is where the mind changes for some. The servants may now tend to feel that their facebook is a private matter, when in reality, it really isn't, because other people, or "friends" that gain access to their accounts can easily disclose what is on them already. What about the kids that do have facebook and invite the servant, etc? The next argument might be that the servants' information and pictures are fine, but they cannot control what others have added onto their page. Therefore, the servant must first decide how much of his/her life can be public or private.

Discipleship has a cost. Servants are not under contract by the church priest, but by the guidance of the Holy Spirit through their spiritual fathers must be faithful and diligent. They need to make a decision on how much of their lives will be sincerely consecrated to the service. Children are like sponges. They will absorb more of the subtle non-verbal messages than most of the lectures combined. When we attempt to redirect children to choose appropriate role models, the young servants are usually the ones whom they choose. The message the servants give to the parents must be much more than 'I am not just an Egyptian-American alternative to your child's role model problem,' but rather, 'I am a principled Christian who sincerely cares about you and your children.'"

3. Remember These Verses

- St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians is an excellent Epistle on characteristics of a servant that all servants should read. Here we mention several verses. These are "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Corinthians 8:9).

“Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:13).

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

4. Summary

- Facebook is a major invasion of privacy
- It is impossible for one to control the content on Facebook
- It becomes a major stumbling block to those we serve.
- It becomes a major stumbling block to the servant himself.
- It does more harm than good.
- It is very difficult to use Facebook in a 100% positive way.
- Discipleship has a cost. We must think very hard about how we effect others in our service and what kind of role model we are to others. We must always think about the issue of being a spiritual stumbling block to others.
- Facebook can be a very deceptive social scheme. It looks very innocent and attractive, but it is often spiritually devastating especially to those young in the faith. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8).