

THE GAPS OF COMMUNICATION

What are the gaps between church and society, between christians and non-christians, about spiritual things?

Gap of Silence

The first is the Gap of Silence - there is simply not much done to defeat evil in all its forms. The army of God has called a truce and sat down to its ecclesiastical sausages for breakfast, while evil goes marching on. There's a lot of talking about justice, and outreach at this breakfast. There's even a certain amount of planning. But precious little happens. Evangelism is still a dirty word.

The body of Christ may be drawn with 5 mouths, no ears, no eyes, and b backsides to sit on, tiny hands, tiny legs, and ever-so tired feet - such a busy time she is having, what with 3 Property Committees, visiting the aged and the sick, sitting on 4 presbytery committees, 2 synod committees, 3 elders councils, 1 parish council, 1 minister's fraternal, 1 hospital board, the local CYSS support group and community counselling centre management committee (our outreach for this year), parish services, camps, socials, weddings and basket teas... The sins of the church go on and on, on and on. There IS one Lord, one Faith, one Hope. Isn't there?

Question

How much do you cringe when the word "evangelism" is used?

Cultural Gap

The second kind of gap is the cultural gap. It comes in several forms.

Ethnicity

Australia is second only to Israel in the degree of our multi-nationality, in recent arrivals to this country. Over a third of New South Wales has some direct connection with immigration. Every Australian is implicated in the continuing dissolution of the Aboriginal people but without knowing any, talking with them. By contrast, the Aboriginal Church's request for a Covenant with the Uniting Church is a great sign

of hope. Can we pull it off, when most churches are mono-racial and still failing to take even first steps in partnership? Fijian, Tongan, Anglo-Celtic, Korean, Arabic. How many languages do you speak?

Question

How many of you work or live alongside people of a different-language background? How will they be reached if you and your church can not handle them?

Generational

The different world views of the pre and post WWII generations are becoming well documented. It can be likened to the differences in style and composition between a fortieth wedding anniversary celebration and a twenty first birthday party. These two images represent the difference between church and society.

The elders of the church have done their best and done very well in things about which the younger people, therefore, can see no importance or relevance. Out of war and depressions, they strived for security, for order, for comfort from strivings. But their children came out of security and comfort and so they sought authenticity, participation and reality. No wonder they are missing from our predominantly conservative churches. And we who have survived

in that "conservative church atmosphere" must question whether we too are tarred with the same brush! We are not so different as we think. Most youth services are just the same old song with a different tune.

Question

When was the last time you and your church wept with compassion, or even thought to?

Socio-economic

The city and rural towns are as segregated as the Alabama blacks. The "other side of the tracks" or "the other side of the creek or the highway", "the housing estate", "the black quarter", "the Westies" - all these expressions demonstrate that segregation of social class is simply taken for granted. Whereas the followers of Jesus were from all social classes - some wealthy, but mostly working and poor classes - we find the churches predominantly and disproportionately wealthy, educated, with stable housing, and stable families. What ever happened - we thought we were people of the good news, but in the marriage crisis, the family bust-up, the housing problem, and among the ones needing help in society,

they have found us useless, tasteless, fruitless. As we congratulate ourselves for paying someone else to do something about it!

Question

How many pieces of literature might you be given when you came to church? List them. What does this say about our cultural bias in the church?

That brings us to the third kind of gap.

Credibility Gaps

Our words and our actions do not match. Our Sunday Churchianity has little connection with Monday to Saturday issues of integrity, authority, intimacy and community. So when we crawl out of our fear and shame of Christ, and eventually talk of repentance or fulfilment, they look at our shallow morality and our ecclesiastical sausage-making machinery and don't even bother to reply. To them, christianity is a non-issue. They are bemused by our dressing up and our rigmarole and our secret little christian fish-stickers on cars and business cards. What has christianity got to do with anything? We have to earn credibility by having integrity in tough spots of life!

Question

You spend almost all of your week around the issues of life at work. Who of you has heard a sermon this year on Christianity that could be applied in their work situation?

So we can't whinge too much if the media give our image a hard time. In most media portrayals, clergy and church are typically paragons of irrelevance and hypocrisy, if not simply stupidity. Well I am pleading not guilty! But there are enough christians playing naively into the hands of a cynical popular press, and enough evangelists starting to believe in their own graven images and taking a tumble, that my cry of "not guilty" won't ever be heard. It is part of a much wider cultural tradition in Australia, that of the establishment church. There never has been one establishment church in Australia in the way there is in England, Germany, Argentina, Italy, France and so on. But because Australian language and customs have been denied in church matters in favour of overseas polish, customs and conservative values, there has never been a sense of "they are one of us". Even the Salvo's respected by Aussies, have

to get around in a uniform from two generations ago. In all our effort, we start from well behind in earning respect for our position. It takes time, patience and humility before anything you say will be correctly understood - even Jesus found that.

Question

Have you heard people say the joke - I would rather go to Hell because that is where my friends will be? What does this joke illustrate about deep seated attitudes to church and to God and to where the truth may be found?

The blindness of unbelief. Scripture warns us that people have a certain great difficulty hearing and understanding spiritual truth, eg. 1 Cor 2:13-14, Romans 1:20-25. If we give little "hints" about Christianity, they simply don't notice them, still less retain them. All that we are and the best we can do and say are not enough to convict, convince or persuade people to follow Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Jesus said it is "from the Spirit" John 3:3-8. Prayer is our chief subversive weapon, and a very effective one, at this point. Be sure before you start, though, that you want the answer to your prayer.

CONCLUSION

It is simply amazing how love shrinks a gap between people, and how love heals a sort and broken heart. How thrilling that love that breaks down barriers that we thought could not be broken. But that is Jesus-love, the active one that walks the talk AND VICE VERSA.