

CULTURAL CONFLICTS— *where we got it wrong*

[~editorial series: # 1]

UNFORGIVEN: AN IMMEASURABLE COST

With this new year we begin a new series—

CULTURAL CONFLICTS— *where we got it wrong*

This is not to say that the Christian faith is in constant conflict with culture; to the contrary, throughout history and in many parts of the world, Christian faith has contributed and nurtured her surroundings. But in this era of postChristian sentiment our culture has developed an almost oppositional stance toward everything & anything Christian. A priori presuppositions portray caricatures of the Christian faith that may have once been accurate but are now more remnants of leftover religion that has gone the way of the dinosaur and the sawdust trail.

Granted, there remain a few examples of “**charter members of Jerks-for-Jesus.**” but their numbers are being supplanted by the growing number of younger followers of Jesus who *get it*, who are concerned for this world’s poor, with peace around the world, and with our individual need for spiritual salvation couched in a context of bringing justice in society.

Nonetheless, online & print media, Hollywood, and the Press continue to depict conservative Christians as the bane of society, the parasites of the political arena, and the purveyors of puritanical narrow-mindedness worldwide. It is as if holding to any “Truth” outside the flow of majority consensus renders one as a cultural idiot, a threat to progress, and an ignoramus of the facts of life in the *real* world. God forbid that His followers should have any insights that just may be on-target! We just aren’t that intelligent (*misspelling mine*).

However, there are instances throughout history and even today where genuine, in-earnest believers get it wrong. Historically, the Crusades come to mind, as does the Spanish Inquisition, the domination of the Incas & Aztecs, and the “Colonialization” Era of European conquest. [The introduction of our faith to China, parts of India, and Japan was far more *Christian*. And it was Christian slaves who brought a genuine Christian faith to the Norsemen.]

There have been many atrocities committed in the name of Christ, as in the name of the leaders of many other faiths. But for us who claim the name of Jesus, we are truly sorry for our forerunner’s and our contemporary’s acts of violence in the name of our Savior. We were and are wrong to commit such acts. Please forgive us.

Forgive us for not speaking out during the Holocaust, or during the reign of Pol Pot. Forgive us for not opposing the horror released on those who suffered under the rule of Joseph Stalin, Augusto Pinochet, or under the “cultural revolution” in China. We should never have been so silent. We were wrong.

Forgive us, too, for identifying so vehemently with the religious-right, with the conservative political lobbies, and with those who applauded the plight of AIDS in the homosexual community. In truth, our faith is far more gracious and forgiving than these actions portend. We were wrong.

Forgive us for not living up to the standard of human decency and moral integrity we seem to demand from our politicians. *We’re only human*, we say. The truth is—we’re barely Christian. We hold to a

higher code of ethics found in our Scriptures, that calls all peoples to repentance before a Holy God, and offers forgiveness and freedom to all who would huddle under His protection. We seem more intent on defending ourselves than His Holy name. Again, we are wrong. Forgive us.

We have paid a great price for *getting it wrong*, for judging others, rather than journeying with them; for condemning and criticizing, rather than showing compassion and care. We are still paying that price, and probably will for a great long time. One day we will get it right... , maybe. We *ARE* only human— just like you. We are just like you, with regrets, disappointment, great success, and deep sorrows. And, like you, we want to live by our values and beliefs and make a difference in this society.

We’ve gotten it wrong in the past, and probably will do so again in the future. But, by God (literally), we will endeavor to make a difference in this world & in the lives of those around us. So help us God! You could help us too.



SHIFT Tips

~culture clues that click

[Vol. 8, # 1]

1. Relationships take work.
2. Always be the first to say *I'm sorry*; especially when you know you are right.
3. Admit wrong. You did not *mis-speak*: you lied.
4. Work at rebuilding bridges; no one else will..., until you start.
5. Give your critics 50%. Learn through their eyes.

COMMUNICATING CLEARLY— UNDERSTANDING TO BE UNDERSTOOD

Communicating Clearly is one of our Core Courses. Understanding how people listen to information, process it, and integrate into their lives is paramount to presenting any idea in our information over-laden world. We cannot assume that simply presenting our Truth to anyone will be taken as Truth, truth, or discarded as merely TMI. CONTEXT is everything! Failing to take into account the cultural context, the experiential context, and the historical background of an individual while offering them “the gospel” can prove more damaging than you might ever imagine. At worse, they might ascent to the *facts* of our Truth, adhere to the truth of the gospel, but never actually respond to the work of the Holy Spirit of God within.

The rift between the Christian mind and the non-religious mind is widening at a velocity never before imagined. Our presuppositions about life are vastly different from those who never hold a Christian thought. Yet these people are essentially dealing with the same issues we are— how do we make ends meet, why can't I kill my kids, marriage (or lack thereof), self esteem, and is there any meaning to life that I can hang my faith on and give my life to!?! For most of them, though, the question of God has already been answered— if He does exist, it just doesn't matter. I recently overheard an example of this in a local coffee shop— “*I love God too much to believe in him.*” Go figure. It doesn't get any more convoluted than this.

Questions you need answers to *before* you attempt communicating might be— **What has influenced your views about life the most? How does change affect you? What painful experiences have you had? What do you know about the Christian faith? What gets you out of bed in the morning? To what extent do your values influence your daily life?** There are more questions, to be sure; the point is, get to know your audience! WHO is that sitting across the table? How will they hear Christ's message of salvation? Do they even know they have a problem?

We must understand the world of the people to whom we seek to bring the message of Jesus Christ. **Communicating Clearly** addresses the communication aspect of this problem. Wanna play?

emPulse

Do you get NEED's weekly empulsive, electro-magnetic-pulse mind bender? It's a great way to distract yourself, to focus your thoughts, and to challenge yourself to think about who you are and what you are doing in life. You *really* want this!

If you want it, sign up at— melanie@needinc.org.

WINTER WITH NO SNOW— depression, aging, and the meaning of life in a slushy world

These past two months have seen a surplus of the snow in the mid-Atlantic states, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. Florida got snow! And Dallas! What's with that!?! In New England we've barely received a dusting of the white stuff. True, our *far north* got a few feet—but no where near their norm.

Starr and I spent much of our (non)-winter cuddled around our woodstove pondering our futures and the preponderance of slush outside. What shoveling that challenged us isn't worth mentioning. We spent more time brushing off the car. Depressing.

More importantly, this winter future together and the shape of the expanding rather than winding down: ing, if you get my drift. (Fortunately, we still need to get out of bed earlier.)

My creativity continues to sur-fused. My assistant, Melanie, has my brain on track. But I do wear down. prayers as Starr and I seek God's lead-our lives that are coming to bear in this



The Winter that wasn't: Amherst— 2009-2010

gave us the time we needed to start discussing our ministry for which God is designing us. NEEDinc is whereas we are wearing down as well as expand-now have an exercise bike: Starr rides it faithfully. I

prise me. But my productivity feels fractured, less been great in keeping So keep us in your ing on all the factors of new phase of our lives.

Once again, we are being reinvented ☺!

To God be all praise,

Gary & Starr

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