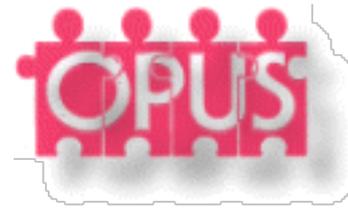


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

**South Africa (Port Elizabeth) and the World
at the Dawn of 2016
Report of a New Year's Listening Post**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants are invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles. This part is concerned with what might be called 'the stuff of people's everyday lives' that relates to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants. Participants are invited to share their preoccupations and experiences as citizens of Australia, and to explore these from their various social roles, be these in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities.

The first speaker, the Clinical Psychologist spoke about some conflict he is experiencing between his work with clients with trans-gender issues and gender changes and the strongly held views about these issues held by the church to which he belongs. He also has a sense that he manages the conflict well and is able to contain it. He does not see his practice as a place to convert people and sees himself as caring and having empathy with these clients who would do less well without his intervention in their lives.

The church, in this instance is a more modern very large church and another church, much more traditional and conservative voted for acceptance of Gay marriages at the annual synod. This has caused some ripples in the membership and will no doubt be revisited at the next synod.

The next speaker who is very active in the Catholic Church also finds that what she encounters with clients who are members of the church, is in direct conflict with the teachings of the church. The church leaders might be horrified to learn about what is happening amongst their flock for e.g. abortions, also cross gender issues, overwhelming violence and revenge behaviour which can only be described as evil. She often feels caught in the middle.

This speaker has also been preoccupied with many losses suffered over the past year both in her work situation and personal life. She lost working with groups in her work situation, a brother-in-law died,

important people in her life e.g. an aroma therapist has stopped practising, a cycling group stopped cycling and a cousin died. She likes variety but when she gets too unsettled she becomes anxious.

The retired doctor then spoke about his struggle to find a value system that fits for him and which can be incorporated into religious belief. He is preoccupied with questions such as "what is God?" and "what is mind ". He is a Quaker and the concept of "Something of God" in everyone fits for him. He has also been preoccupied with recent readings and lectures online about "what is a mind" and uses intersecting circles representing mind, body, soul, spirit. He then found himself adding more dimensions and wondering about spirals and not circles. He believes in the importance of a strong faith and belief system and then wonders whether "the church" will accept it.

The Psychologist member then referred to a book "Creativity Incorporated" where reference is made to circles around the sun and that often the simplest explanation is the best but this may apply to physics and not be applicable to life and concepts about embracing the complexity may be more appropriate.

Another member has been reading a book by Richard Rohr which deals with where people are, regarding the church and doctrine and expresses the theory that in the second half of life people are more accepting and only few younger people are accepting. People project spirituality onto the church and the "dark side" is projected onto the current scapegoat. The downside of many religions is that they do not have simple cut and dried solutions for complex situations but people are becoming more open to complexity.

Reference was then made about the Pope who is compassionate with people and who spoke about people fearing priests who are too rigid.

The next speaker spoke about a preoccupation with "change but no change". She referred to the above mentioned church which accepted Gay marriages only to receive a backlash from the congregation who has appealed against this decision.

She went on to speak about working in an organization who had employed her as a consultant to bring about change yet blocked her at every turn. It felt as if the organization was putting obstacles in the way of the work. She is a White woman who was brought into a largely Black organization. She spoke about "sophisticated resistance" when for example notices for a meeting were not sent out and dates of meetings or team building were changed. The member wrote a very stern letter and tried on four occasions to meet with the people who had approached her, but to no avail. She then got really angry at their passivity and their lack of feedback to her. This strategy seemed to

move the organization and she had that day received a letter from the HR executive with dates for January.

Part 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim is to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

1. Public vs. Private
2. Pulpit vs. Therapy room
3. Fundamentalism (religiosity) vs. Spirituality (respectful acceptance of difference)
4. Paradoxes
 - 2 churches - progressive vs. fundamental
 - change but no change
 - 16 days of activism march next day and yet the way victims are treated at police stations and the courts do not add up
 - the above point also discrepant with the high rate of murders of partners
 - the VW saga where a previously well respected, "honest", "ethical" company has left scores of people disillusioned
5. Containing the dissonance
 - different kinds of spirituality
 - divine and animalistic
 - handling members caught in beliefs at odds with higher echelons in organizations
 - ethics of organizations / corporates regarding health and /or values when they clash with our values

Part 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members are working with the information resulting from Parts 1 and 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members are working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

1. There is a denial and suppression that we will reach a tipping point and we forestall that by appealing to the church or organization which is asked to carry our own weaker shadow to prevent it from tripping us up but there is also the possibility that the struggle will lead to maturational growth and a move to a higher level
2. We imbue the church, organizations and individuals with

standards which contain unrealistic images and values in order to escape the paradox of good and evil in the world and in ourselves and then attack the church or organization or icon (Hansie Cronje, Oscar Pretorius and Volkswagen)

3. We set up public figures or organizations to carry our duality and then we attack or denigrate them thus destroying the container and then end up feeling helpless and bereft

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