

The World We Live In and Changes to My Life

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-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

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I am planning to be away in May so I am writing this letter in late April. I do not want to work during the time off. I plan to go sailing for a month before I sell my boat.

I have long wanted to write about the world we live in and the changes that have taken place in my life and possibly in yours and how these changes affect us. To begin with I was born in what would have been at the time a middle class family. We were not poor even though I saw myself as coming from a poor family. The main problem was that my parents were frugal and there was not much money to spend. I grew up in the depression years. I worked from the time I was 12 years old carrying papers to earn my lunch money for school and to buy a few things I wanted. I was 7 years old when the Great Depression started and there really was not much money around until 1938-9. The people I associated with on my job and in school were of all socioeconomic levels. I was looked on as belonging to the "out crowd" in our high school since I carried papers, and was much younger than most of my contemporaries. I graduated from high school when I was 15.

On my paper route were all kinds of people. They ranged from the "upper crust" to prostitutes, horse and mule dealers and the proprietors of pool rooms. In the pool rooms one could buy marijuana, narcotics, and place bets. (Yes! they had marijuana in those days too.) The prostitutes were some of my best paying customers. They were very nice and because they recognized my youth they never propositioned me. I never bought anything in the pool rooms, and they too did not try to sell me anything. Some of the "upper crust" tried to cheat me out of payments if they could, but I kept good records and they did not succeed.

After high school I entered a world where, except for a brief interlude, I remained until I retired from the university in 1984. That world was the world of academia. I loved to learn so I never left it for long. After I left prep school I went to one of the best universities in my region. I was not prepared for the rigors of that kind of learning or motivated to accept them, so I dropped out of school in the winter of 1940-41 and went to work on a construction job. The people there were different from those I had known even in high school. My boss was an ex-con who was primarily a bootlegger. He made moonshine as an occupation, but had come to work on the construction job to make extra money. He had murdered a man and did time for it. One of my colleagues had a third grade education. One other had graduated from high school, but he got drafted and did not stay long. The rest of the people that I associated with were from all walks of life, but most were of the lower socioeconomic classes. If you class people on a five point scale, they were classes 4 and 5.

Social classes are usually determined by a two factor index where the two factors are education and income. These factors are weighted either up or down. There is a three point scale where the education of the person's parents is considered, but it is seldom used. Using the two point index, Class 1 is made up of people with at least a college education and an income above \$100,000. Anyone with a degree higher than a undergraduate degree is in Class 1 no matter what their income is classified as. Class 2 is made up of middle and lower managerial persons with college degrees and an income of \$50,000 or above. Class 3 is made up of white collar workers and skilled artisans who have a high school education or a college or technical school education and an income of \$30,000 or above. Teachers and supervisors and secretaries would be in this group. Class 4 is made up of blue collar workers and skilled artisans with a high school education or less. They make less than \$50,000. Class 5 is made up of people with less than a high school education and are unskilled workers.

The socioeconomic level a person occupies has a lot to do with how they relate to others. First of all, it affects their communication with others. A person in Class 1 has at least 15,000 words in their vocabulary, and the higher their degree the greater is their vocabulary. For instance, when a medical student starts to medical school he usually has a vocabulary of 15 to 20,000 words. When he graduates he has a vocabulary of 40 to 50,000 words. There are over 300,000 words in the English language so even in Class 1 there is great variation in the vocabularies of people in different occupations. A lawyer knows many words that I do not know or use, and a preacher knows many that a lawyer does not know or use. If he communicates in his professional jargon, I have difficulty understanding him.

In contrast, a person in Class 5 has about 4 to 5,000 words in their vocabulary and if they are intellectually compromised they may have only 2 or 3,000 words. During WWII a simple language called Basic English was devised that allowed people to communicate with a vocabulary of only 400 words. Needless to say communication was limited. Looking at this data it is obvious that communication between socioeconomic groups many times poses real difficulties, for those in the lower groups cannot communicate at a higher level. Those in the higher levels have to lower their level to make communication effective.

In the same way, people in different socioeconomic groups have different interests. If I wanted to talk to a prostitute on my paper route, I had to communicate about her world. At the time I did not know what her subculture was like so we had no common interests. That precluded effective communication outside of me collecting for the paper. That was true of many of my other customers. When I dropped out of college and worked on the construction job, I again had to communicate at a lower level with the people I worked with there. I solved this problem by just listening to them. They talked about how much "likker" they could drink, how many women they had sex with, or how much money they had lost gambling. Their language was filled with obscenities and

curses. Except for the curses and obscenities, I could not talk about "likker" and women because I did not drink and was not sexually promiscuous. When work was light, they either played poker or shot craps in the back room. I did not gamble either. It was obvious that their value system was quite different from mine. I was interested in the war and other things going on in the world, whereas they had little interest in what went on beyond their little lives. They rarely read the newspapers and what news they got, they sporadically got from the radio.

Their musical interests were different from mine too. I listened to music played by the big bands that were popular in that era. They listened to country music. That is not to say that I did not like country music, but I could not make it a steady diet. We had a radio in the building where I worked and it was always tuned to a country music station. The greatest problem that I had, though, was the lack of intellectual stimulation. The people I was working with had simply reached the level of intellectual development that they were capable of reaching, and had quit learning. Their knowledge base was quite limited and they could not contribute to mine, although my boss did teach me a lot about bootlegging and avoiding the revenuers. The jobs I held when I was working construction did increase my mechanical skills. I learned how to drive different kinds of trucks and heavy construction equipment, but none of this increased my intellectual knowledge. It was because I had a great thirst for knowledge that I finally quit my job and went back to school. I did not want to remain in that world.

When I finished college I moved up into socioeconomic Class 2. I was a chemist and could draw a salary that would put me in that class, but I still thirsted for knowledge so I chose to go to medical school. When I finished medical school I had moved into Class 1. Remember now that I had started out in Class 3 and I had been socially mobile enough to go to the top. When I did, I had to reject my Class 3 roots. This created a certain unrest in me. I knew I was in a different world, but I was uncomfortable in it. E. Gartly Jaco, a cultural anthropologist who I worked with in Texas, called this *anomie*. The dictionary defines anomie as personal unrest, or alienation. That is what happens when one is upward socially mobile. You do get a sense of unrest. You wonder if you belong where you are, but you know you cannot go back to where you came from because your interests and activities are dramatically changing. You become alienated from your roots.

To solve the problem of anomie, I had to realize that all humans have a human nature and it reveals itself in behavior that is essentially the same for all people. When I started going to parties in medical school, I found that the conversations were much the same as on the construction job. Some people talked about how much liquor they could drink and privately they would brag about their sexual exploits. They told dirty jokes and their language was often filled with obscenities and curses just like construction workers. I had a obstetrics professor who swore and cursed as well as anyone I had heard before. The same was true for some surgeons.

I don't want you to think that everyone drank, fornicated or committed adultery or cursed and swore as I have described. But it was really notable that education did not always change man's nature. People sin in the same ways at all socioeconomic levels.

It is true, too, that there is not much love at all levels of society. It is a dog-eat-dog world and except on rare occasions people do not want their positions in life threatened. They are not anxious to do anything to advance another person's status in life or want the best for them. They will not allow them to "get ahead" if they can help it. Only some Christians tend to show the kind of selflessness that makes them want the best for others. They, of course, stand out and are often taken advantage of or persecuted by people who do not want to be reminded of their sinfulness. The viciousness of some people in the world became apparent to me long before I became a Christian. When I presented my first major paper at a national scientific meeting, I was just a resident. It was the custom in those days to have a discussant, so I was prepared for a discussion that I expected to be genteel. My discussant was the chairman of a department of psychiatry in a northern medical school. When he got up to discuss my paper, he began to question my integrity and my methods of data collection. Before he was through, he even attacked me personally. I could not believe my ears. I replied to him forthrightly and then sat down. I later found that he was doing research similar to mine and I had beat him into the literature with it. He was jealous and used the old technique of attacking the person if you cannot attack his research. Giles St. Aubyn calls this the *argumentum ad hominum*. I was not a Christian so I hated him for his unfair attack. I remembered what he had done to me, and as I rose the academic ladder I despised him for his immaturity.

Through the years I worked with some fine people in other specialties, and when people wanted a collaborator from psychiatry they came to me. I loved the intellectual interchange that I had with people from other disciplines and took every opportunity to learn more. Most of all I loved to work with students. They were refreshing beyond compare. They wanted to learn so they got excited about the research we were doing. We were creating new knowledge and that is always exciting. When they made a significant contribution, I included them as an author and sometimes gave them the opportunity to present the papers we had written. I did not demand to be the first author even though it was my idea and my research funds that sponsored the project. They got so excited about appearing before a scientific assembly that they could hardly contain themselves.

All during these years the only persons that I associated with from lower socioeconomic groups were my patients. They came from all walks of life and it was good that I could reach back into my past so that I could communicate with them. As a child I had spent considerable time on the farms of my grandparents and uncles so I knew something about farming. My experiences in construction and in the jobs where I worked as a bar tender, short order cook and soda jerk

brought me into contact with all kinds. In those years I had to learn to communicate with them and I did not forget how.

When we started one of the first pain clinics in the country, others came to do research there. Another anthropologist came to observe for several weeks and made some comments on how we handled our patients. He told one of my colleagues that he was amazed at my communication skills. He observed that I easily discerned their level of communication, and communicated with them thereafter at their level. I had always prided myself on being able to do this, but it was nice to have someone provide confirmation.

In the middle of my academic career I became a Christian. I did not change my socioeconomic status, but suddenly I was alienated from the field of psychiatry. I developed anomie again. I had watched one of my professors throw a Bible out the window of a patient's room when I was a student. I also had read the rejection of Christianity by many of the best minds in psychiatry. It was only a few months after I had become a Christian that I sat eating lunch with 40 of America's best psychiatrists and listened to them bad mouth God, Jesus and the whole of the Judeo-Christian tradition. I was examining on the American Board of Neurology and Psychiatry at the time, and I did not know much about Christianity, but I did know that there is a God and that he lives.

What do you do when suddenly you feel that you are alienated from all your friends and your colleagues? The only thing I could figure out to do was to keep a low profile. They taught me that in the army in WWII. The word was if you stand up, they will shoot at you.

I also was afraid that I could be alienated from my wife who I loved dearly. This was a deep fear. I had not read the Bible at the time, so it was much later that I learned Jesus said part of the potential price one has to pay when we become his follower is alienation from those we love. Fortunately, I discovered that my wife had been a Christian since she was a teenager, and she was delighted. An example of how husbands and wives can be alienated is seen in the recent divorce of Ted Turner of Turner Broadcasting fame, and his wife Jane Fonda. It occurred because she became a born-again Christian and abandoned his philosophical position. He is an ardent environmentalist and pro-abortionist. His anger at her is seen in the hateful remarks about Christians that he has recently uttered.

If one has had a radical encounter with the Lord, it is difficult to keep from serving him. Since the medical world I lived in was about as pagan as it could be, I had to conceal the fact that I had become a Christian and for at least two years I did nothing Christian in my work. Fortunately, I could indulge my faith outside the medical center. There I was again thrown back into associating with persons from much lower socioeconomic levels. On one of my first encounters, I was with a team of laymen who were doing lay evangelism in churches. On my first trip,

the only thing I had in common with the people I was with that weekend was my faith. I was very immature in my faith for I really had not been discipled. I did not know how to pray, I had not studied the Bible, so my biblical knowledge was zilch. When we arrived for our first team meeting, I was introduced to other team members. The first guy was a "redneck." He really had a red neck. His skin, like that of many farmers, was sunburned and he was "kinda" red all over. He was a dairy farmer. When I was introduced he smiled and when he did I noticed that the only teeth one could see were his two canines in his upper mouth. He really looked like a country bumpkin. The next man I was introduced to was huge. He was probably the most inarticulate person I have ever met. His wife, however, had a few thousand well chosen words to say about everything. Like today's youth, she interlaced her conversation with a unique "and everything" instead of "you know". The fourth person I met weighed about 300 pounds. She dipped snuff and her saliva stained brown ran down from the corners of her mouth. When I shook her hand she pulled me to herself, embraced me and kissed me! She commented that God loved me and she loved me too. I wiped the brown stain off my face with my handkerchief. I did not doubt, though, that she loved me. My thought after the introductions was, "Lord, you really have some unusual people in your kingdom."

What God did that weekend was to show me that it doesn't take much of a man or woman to be a Christian, but it takes all of them there is. The red necked guy to whom I was first introduced showed me how to pray. He could pray as if he was having a conversation with God. Before I met him, I thought you had to pray in King James English. I did not know that you could talk to God as you would your own father. I did not know what and when to pray either. All of the people I met seemed to know the Bible and could quote it readily to make a point. I could not do that. I could not even quote John 3:16. They also kept talking all weekend about the Holy Spirit. I knew nothing about Him, just like I knew nothing about Jesus and his Father. When these people shared their testimony, and that was all they did, I was amazed to hear how the "and everything" woman had been rescued from a life of prostitution by God using the inarticulate man, and how the obese woman who dipped snuff had been changed from a broken, battered and bruised child into a loving wife and mother. I was also amazed at the witness of many others who were on our team of about 25 that weekend. The main thing that I learned, though, was that I needed to learn to rightly communicate with God and his people.. They spoke a different language.

It's funny, though, what they communicated to the people in that church that weekend was that God is love. They did not have to use high sounding words, or King James English to let them know that fact. Their testimony changed many lives, but I did not contribute much. I was just a baby Christian, but I sure learned a lot.

It happened that while I was there that I bought for 35 cents a copy of *Good News for Modern Man* the ABS contemporary version of the Bible. When I got

home I sat down to look at it ,but instead read the entire New Testament before I went to bed that morning around 4 AM. I am a fast reader so the King James version was no fun to read with its archaic language requiring translation. When I read this version, the words literally leaped off the page. Finally I could comprehend the Bible and began discovering its truths. In a few weeks I was beginning to be biblically literate. I did not learn how to pray right away, but I had learned that prayer is an intimate conversation with God. When I did pray thereafter it was easier. I am a good conversationalist and I did just fine. I did not know what to pray about, but I soon learned. Because of these developments, I was soon able to communicate with real Christians since I had learned their jargon too. I still could not communicate with theologians.

One thing stands out in my mind from those early experiences. It is that the message of Jesus is simple. One little girl said it was so simple that anyone, even a "retarded child," can understand it. I have seen many intellectually compromised people who have received the message. The message is that **Jesus is Lord**. I once spoke to my father's Sunday school class that was made up of successful businessmen. When I got through making that point, one of the men said, "Doctor, you sure make it sound simple." Jesus knew it was a simple message. He said that God had revealed it to children preferentially because it was simple (Matt. 11:25). Unfortunately the world has made it complicated. It is not! All socioeconomic classes can understand it if they will become like little children and trust.

The fact that anyone can understand it is important. One can take an aboriginal tribesman in Africa or a scientist in the ivory towers and to them, the message is the same. One just has to hear it in a language they understand. On my second trip to Madagascar I was asked to "preach" to a group of alcoholics. A few of them spoke French and all of them spoke Malagasy. It was obvious that my message would have to be translated. The man who did the job was quite good. One of the missionaries there who spoke English and Malagasy said that it was interesting to hear the message in two languages. She was amazed that my translator had conveyed the message just as I had given it. What was more interesting was that all 21 men gave their lives to Christ when I gave them an invitation to do so. It was obvious that God had used my message in a language that I did not understand to change men's lives. That message was simple. God changes lives and makes new men and women out of the old. Do you want your lives changed? They all did, so I explained that they were all sinners. They knew that! I then told them that the punishment for sin was death. They knew that too. I told them next that there was Good News, Jesus took their punishment by dying on the cross. They could be forgiven. All they had to do was believe that He was resurrected from the dead and ask him to be the Lord and Master of their lives. They all asked Him in as I led them in the prayer for salvation.

After the service, the two Catholic priests who were in the group asked me if they could use the message when they were teaching their catechists. I asked them in

return if they were forbidden to use the Bible in their preaching. No, they replied. I then told them that the message came straight from the Bible, they could use it. It belongs to God not me. They went away pleased.

The point of this commentary is that the message of Christ's cross is so simple that there is no excuse for presenting to everyone. We do not have to be an evangelist! We do not need to be theologically educated. We do not have to take a course in homiletics. We do not need to be ordained. All we need is an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, trust in him, and the boldness to offer his saving love to those who don't know him.

To lead people to Him we need to come along side them. We need to engage them in conversation by getting them to tell us about either their family, their work or themselves. The first act of love is to listen. If we do, they will tell us about their problems. Most of the time their problems revolve around relationships. When Jesus reconciles us to God, he makes it possible for us to be reconciled to others. Those who are lost need to know that He is the answer today for the world and the people in it. They will not know if we do not present the message to them.