

ONIONS, ORANGES, AND OTHER REVELATIONS

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Revelation is a wonderfully dramatic word. It is defined as *a striking disclosure of something previously unknown or not realized*. And as I looked at that definition, I had a revelation— I am an onion. It's true. And you are all onions too. That's not a bad thing, because the onion is an interesting vegetable: It's made up of layers, and each layer is determined by the layer underneath it (i.e., it is shaped by the underlayers). If you want to analyze an onion, you need to look at one layer at a time: taking off the top layer to reveal what's underneath and so on until you get to the core— And contained in the core are all the genetic traits, DNA, smell, color, feel, taste, properties—everything that makes it an onion.

Now what does that mean in human terms? Like the onion, we are all made up of layers that make us look, think and behave in certain ways. And just as each onion is a little different, so each person is a little different, depending on the various layers and the core. And we can study those layers in order to understand others, whether it's the people right next to us or of another country.

What are the layers of the onion?

BEHAVIORAL LEVEL: patterns of behavior, artifacts/objects, language, food, clothes, etc.

AUTHORITY LEVEL: 1. ideological (formal statement of belief of a people) 2. social (patterns and standards enforced by peer pressure, social pressure) 3. economic (economic patterning determines other layers of authority; e.g. economics of communism)

EXPERIENCE LEVEL: 1. History 2. Environment (which influences experience; eg, s.CA different environment than OR, therefore different types of housing, clothing, lifestyle, etc.)

3. personal experience

CORE: the world view. Values, informal beliefs and assumptions (things that you just know to be true and aren't up for discussion)

The core is what we are concerned about now. It determines what we look like and how we behave. Changing the core, changes everything else in our worldview. As Christians, we naturally behave differently than non-Christians. We were probably bopping along as a jumbo yellow onion, and then we accepted the Lordship of Christ in our lives; at that point we find that Christ essentially removes our existing jumbo yellow onion core— and replaces it with a new core—perhaps a Walla Walla Sweet. This new core then begins changing the layers from the inside out, until we have become a Walla Walla Sweet instead of a jumbo yellow. This is what it means in 2 Cor. 5:17:

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” We have been made into a new onion.

(* what reveals Christ in us)

So how is our core of Christ revealed, if our outer layers reflect what's inside? Scripture says “by your fruit you are known.” We should be producing the fruits of His Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

We are people who have crucified the sinful nature and are not ruled by its passions and desires. (2 Cor. 5:15) we do not live for ourselves, but for Christ. We do what is right, love our brother, share with those in need, put feet and actions to our words; endure hardship, fight for Christ and live in the power of God. That's what our outer layers reflect as Christians.

If, as Christians, we are not revealing Christ, then we are not revealing our true nature/true core. We are like an onion trying hard to look like an orange. We need to be honest to ourself and our

world view. So with that in mind, how is our core revealed through drama?

(* what is it to reveal Christ through drama)

- **1. our work reflects a Christian worldview.** It can do no other. (There is a caterpillar whose skin is transparent. When you look at them you see the food on which they feed. The skin of our souls, too, is transparent. Looking at us, people see that on which we feed. They are helped or hindered according to the nature of that food. [Amy Carmichael])

Our theatre should reflect our Christian worldview, which it will do if we are feeding on the things of Christ. That does not mean solely the message of spiritual salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ--it is a concern for the total man, just as Christ was concerned for the whole man. He healed the sick, raised the dead, grieved with friends, fed the hungry, and ultimately died in our place as a sacrifice for sin. Christians are different from the rest of the world in their view of redemption and the way of life it entails. To have true integrity of faith, this difference must be an integral part of all the Christian does: in relationships, how you live your life, work, and art. Your worldview should be reflected in all the outer layers.

- 2. balance what Francis Schaeffer calls the major and minor themes

The minor theme is emphasized by many secular artists, but often avoided by Christians. It shows the abnormality of the revolting world, and focuses on sinful man, meaninglessness, loss, and the defeated, sinful side of the Christian's life.

The major theme is optimistic, focusing on the meaningfulness and purposefulness of life, absolute morals, existence of God. This is the triumph of the Christian life! Concentrating only on this major theme, however, leads to a romanticized art, unrealistic to the audience because it is unbelievable. A counterpoint is needed to keep the balance, to keep the believability. This romanticized view of life is what often turns people off of so-called "Christian" drama: the pain and struggle is not acknowledged or fully realized—everyone lives happily ever after if they just accept Jesus, all their problems are solved. People know that's not the case—and it's not what

God promised either.

But to only focus on the minor theme belies our Christian worldview and the ultimate triumph of God that is an integral part of that worldview. A balance of the two themes is needed.

(Gordon Bennett) :

“The Christian dramatist ...doesn’t have to tell the whole gospel at once. He may find insights coming from the negative dramatic work of people like Albee, Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett, who depict man’s loneliness and hopelessness without God. But he will not stop there. He must do more than expose man’s depravity, more than raise searing questions about human existence; he must start to work out some answers in terms of justice, love, reconciliation, and resurrection.” That is our responsibility.

- 3. discovery principle: that moment of aha! is seated in the center of a person. This is where change will occur, this is what we need to reach.

Discovery principle: the process of discovery impacts people much more than just giving it to them on a platter. You lay the groundwork, they discover the truth for themselves. (but need to give sufficient information for them to make the discovery)

What Peter perceived as discovery was labeled revelation by Jesus (statement made by Kraft in “Christianity and Culture”, 164). Mt. 16:15-17

“‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.’”

Peter made the discovery within himself that Jesus was the Christ: but Jesus still gave him sufficient clues to make this discovery. Peter saw the miracles, heard Jesus’ teachings and how he referred to himself in Messianic terms, identifying with God the Father; in other words, Jesus dropped lots of clues for Peter to *help* him make the discovery that he, Jesus, was the Christ.

It is a temptation to want to control people's reactions to our artistic creation. But the true creation of art is the ability of the artist to risk losing control of the response of the audience, allowing them to draw their own conclusions and turn it towards their own purposes, just as God did not create mankind as robots, controlling every impulse and thought. He allowed us freedom to draw our own conclusions, and discover truth for ourselves. The process of discovery comes from the innermost being, which is the center for change and belief. It is the only way that people will truly change.

The debate often rages between "propaganda" and "art". It is considered bad to use drama as propaganda and good to strive for art. Let's look at both sides: all art communicates something. Even "art for art's sake" reflects the artist's worldview. There has to be some point of reference for the artist in order to create. It may not be conscious, but it is always there (just as an onion doesn't necessarily set out to make a statement about onionness, but it still reveals its onion essence--still smells like an onion).

We shudder at the term "propaganda"--an evil, evil word that raises images in our minds of Communist propagandists using art & literature to force people to ascribe to their belief system. But that word "propaganda" simply means *to spread the knowledge of opinions or beliefs*. This is our call as Christians.

To "reveal" something is to disclose, divulge, make known by discourse or communication—and a lot of drama fits into that category. Most sketches are trying to make a point. Is that bad? Absolutely not! It is a valid and effective means of teaching. Often times, however, what makes the difference between a bad sketch and a good sketch is the use of the discovery principle. How much information is given to the audience member on a platter, how much attempt is there to force a belief or action, and how much do they discover for themselves? God did not forcefeed us what we should do, say and think, although He obviously wants us to believe in Him. He gave us a choice to make our own discoveries, and we should do likewise.

What about "art"--the great good? Art is a way of expressing a view of the world in such a way

that others can share in the experience. It is an expression of our humanity and all its experiences. What we look for in a work of art is durability (the test of time), integrity (technical expertise), validity (being true to your world view), inevitability (couldn't have been done any other way), and unity (does it hang together). Truthful art is also that art which incorporates morality. Art by itself is "intent on the good of the work," whereas morality is "intent on the good of man." The integration of the two results in a complete work of truth.

We can call drama "bad" that is heavy-handed propaganda, i.e., it forces the audience to adhere to its statements and beliefs. But by the same token we can also call "theatre art" bad when it gives no message, or hides it so thoroughly that no one can discover it.

What it comes down to is knowing what your responsibility as a Christian is, what your responsibility as an artist is, and seeking to integrate the two. Good propaganda will rely on the discovery principle; good art will incorporate the discovery principle.

But I'd like to take this a bit further:

we often use Jesus' parables as justification for the use of drama/storytelling. And you notice that the parables were not self-explanatory. The disciples had to come to Jesus and ask what they meant. For the majority of people, Jesus left them to search for the discovery themselves, but for those he was purposefully trying to move ahead in faith and understanding he took the time to explain the meaning to them. I think we forget this part as we get caught up in putting on drama. We say that the parables weren't obvious in their message, so why should we be? And we forget that Jesus' overriding purpose was to reveal the truth to those who were seeking.

Jesus looked for feedback to see where people's understanding was at. ("who do people say I am?"). He didn't just drop clues and go on his merry way. Likewise, we need to check if the message is being communicated. Do the people hear what you are hoping they'll hear? What purposeful steps are you taking to move people along during the drama, and after the play is over?

The process of discovery differs with differing world views, so in order to maximize the discovery process, you need to know the world view of your target audience—which can be tricky, because people differ. A green onion looks very different from a Walla Walla sweet, and both are different from the jumbo yellow: but they are all onions. It's just that the core has different programming— and that's like the differences between cultures; why Koreans behave and believe differently from Ethiopians, and Americans behave differently from the French.

We must know others' world views if we are to effectively reveal Christ to them.

*** How do we know their world view?**

We can begin by looking at the outer layers of the onion, and work our way in; kind of like searching for clues to unravel a mystery, only this is observing outward behavior and structure to discover what's important in that world.

These outer layers are what we notice first when going to other cultures (most obvious between different country groups, but also applicable across subcultures in our own city).

For example: Clothing—

prostitute vs business woman: different purposes, job descriptions

women commonly wear trousers in the US, but in many countries respectable women wear dresses. Generation X dresses differently than postwar: different views of the world.

Space—

Italians have a small personal space; Americans have a large one. Get them together and you'll see the Italian chasing the American around the room trying to feel comfortable, while the American is backing away trying to stay comfortable.

Artifacts—

Hippo collection in my house. The obvious is that I like hippos. The deeper meaning is that I struggle with weight and started collecting them to remind me not to stop struggling with

it. That also shows a worldview where thin is the ideal.

And what about drama style? Each country has a different way of dramatic and artistic expression.

What is revealed to me about the culture through their drama style?

Indian storytelling—melodramatic poses, codified hand/feet/eye movements (change is not valued, the traditional way should be preserved; tradition is important)

Japanese— jo hai kyu: the importance of presentation and control. Value of discipline.

You may wish to serve Mexicans, Italians, Japanese, Indians, baby boomers or postmoderns. Are you willing to understand and use their outer layers to begin the process of identification?

Amy Carmichael—a missionary to India—wore a sari, and when asked said, “it touches hearts. For Jesus there was only one way of service; the way of the incarnation. A man must make himself one with those whom he wishes to serve.

- Christ revealed himself in the incarnation, to be understandable to man.

Allow me to change the analogy of the onion, and introduce a mixture of fruits and vegetables—namely, onions and oranges.

Here’s the problem. Onions and oranges are from two very different places. Onions grow in the ground, in the dirt, oranges grow on trees, in the fresh air. Each looks at the other and wonders how they can take living under such conditions--the orange might think “if the onion would only get itself out of the ground and come up here where it’s sunny and breezy, it would enjoy life much more and would smell better too.” And so he begins yelling down at the onion, “hey, come on up here to this branch. If you hang here with me, your smell will become fragrant, and your skin will toughen up and get some color.” Now the onion is sitting in the ground, enjoying the

hearty, earthy surroundings, and is quite comfortable where he's at. The orange's position on the branch seems very precarious, and quite exposed to the sun's ultraviolet rays. He yells back, "You're sunburned. If I go up there, my skin will be ruined. Besides, what's so great about being an orange? Your scent is too sharp, your shape is too round." The orange resents those comments, and tells the other oranges how ignorant the onions are, how difficult to talk to, how they'll never understand orange life. The onion hears that and tells the other onions how egocentric and proud the oranges are. There's a lot of animosity going on, and neither side understands the other very well. The orange is completely foreign to the onion. They're just too different to communicate their true view of the world to each other. It would help begin the dialogue process if the orange would put on an onion skin and jump down to join the onions in the earth. At least he won't appear strange at first, and the onions would be more apt to listen to stories about life as an orange, and how to become one, without tuning out right away. (In other words, the orange is trying not to be a stumbling block to understanding. Gets an initial hearing, better chance at finding out the underlayers of the onion).

What do onions and oranges have to do with theatre? If your goal is to share your world view/to communicate through your art, then you need to make sure your drama is understandable.

When I go into other cultures to perform and train in drama, I will be using their drama styles to get a better hearing, and so that my Westernness won't be all they see—that may taint the message, or cause them to hear a different message.

- bring the form to them, rather than expect them to come to your form. (whether "them" is postmoderns or tribal Indian villagers). Find out what's important to them. Not so much, this is what they need to hear--may have no meaning to them (sin, justification, etc.) Meet them where they're at, as Christ did. Do all you can to present Christ in an intelligible way, clothing your message in their form, as Christ clothed himself in human form to help us understand his love.

So, what is our purpose in doing drama?

To reveal Christ. If our lives and activities are not focused on revealing Christ to those around us, then what's the point? We have lost our flavor and aroma. Romans 16:25-27 puts it this way:

“Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

- Christ is revealed in order to move the nations to belief and obedience, so we need to have that in mind as we seek to show the revealed Christ.

Are we doing drama to exercise our skills and have a good time, and give pleasure to an audience, or are we doing it to make clear or visible, to display, some aspect of Christ that will make Him known to the people around us—our audiences, our cast and crew, the critics—and not only to make Him known, but to move the nations toward obedience and belief. (Our call as Christians is to make disciples. Christianity spread rapidly in the first three centuries, in spite of persecution, martyrdom and hardship, because people were passionate about their faith. The tremendous missionary activity in the 19th century was because people were convinced that without Christ, people would go to hell--be eternally damned. Do we still have this kind of passion, or are we content to live our lives, doing things that bring us pleasure, but may not be making an eternal difference to the people around us?)

We need to stay true to our world view as Christians, which includes having a passion for bringing others into the kingdom of heaven. But we also need to understand what world view is being expressed by understanding the outer layers, and speaking to your audience in a way they understand, to give them the optimum chance of accepting the message, or discovering Christ.

As you do theatre, in whatever form—sketches for church service, dessert theatre, missions trips, street theatre, community theatre, professional theatre, schools—be mindful of what world view you are showing. Is Christ being revealed? Are the clues too hidden under a mass of art, or too exposed through propaganda? Is your world view one of passion for those who do not have Christ at their core, or are you content to entertain yourself and others without seeking to take them one step closer to eternal joy?

We are learning this weekend how to improve our skills in drama, so that we can give the best of ourselves and our talent to God. But in a sense, this is just the outer layer of the onion-- allow the fragrance of the onion to come out in your art and in your life, i.e, let the fragrance of Christ permeate all that you do, and reveal its unmistakable aroma, no matter what clothing you put on it.