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So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish.

"So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish." is the title from the 4th book in Douglas Adams *"The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy."* trilogy. And the phrase has been floating around in my grey matter for a while now.

The title of the book comes from an incident in the story..... Because of the imminent destruction of the earth to make way for a new hyperspatial express route, all the dolphins depart. However one leaves behind it a message etched into the glass of its aquarium tank, 'So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish'.

The person responsible for the dolphins and who had in fact been studying them until now, realises that the dolphins were in fact more intelligent than man and that they could have communicated with us. In actual reality the dolphins were all the time studying us humans and playing with us, instead of the other way around.

To me, this is a great picture of those who are leaving the "Church." Let me put it this way...

The "Church" is intrigued by us "leaving types" (dolphins), they try to understand us, testing our intelligence, and trying to communicate with us. They even sometimes play to what they think of as our whims, to

keep us in the fold. But when the "leaving types" do exit out of the "Church" their intelligence is called into question, they are considered backsliders, rebels or even individualists.

The "leaving types" know that Christendom has run its course and no longer has an influence on the Earth and that the "Church" is the last institution of that great age. "Leaving types" are in fact very social and we have tried to communicate with the "Church," to help them to come to a new understanding of freedom in Christ. In the end we give up trying and just play along, accepting the tidbits we are offered, until we know it is time to leave. *"So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish."*

The parable further explained.....

'What is the difference between a martyr and a prophet?'

Earlier I referred to two types of groups, the 'Church' and the 'leaving type.' I will try to profile these groups a bit further.

The Church:

- Entrenched still in Christendom.
- Community is drawn to personality. Often talks of being a community, but fosters individualism.
- **Leadership** = CEO, business models.

- **Worship** = professionalism and entertainment.
- Evangelism = marketing, programmes, consumerism, i.e. Seeker services.
- **Image** = commercials.
- One size fits all.

If you live within the modern Western world, it is very probable that the Evangelical / Pentecostal Church you attend will exhibit most of the above.

Leaving types:

- Want to belong to a community, not interested in personalities.
- Spirituality is key to ones life, embodied in discipleship. Being saved is just the beginning, a desire to work out ones salvation.
- Value participation, not a spectator role. Participation means more than raising ones hands, singing a few songs and being on the church roster.
- Authentic.
- Ministries based on a persons gifts and vision, not programmes.
- Desire to be social, interactive, multi sensory. . .

The "leaving types" become frustrated when in an environment controlled by the "Church". The "Church" encourages them through 'counsel' and 'ministry' to become good Christians like every one else. Sometimes they are even slotted into positions of responsibility or leadership so they will feel they are contributing and participating. But for the "leaving types", "Church" becomes all the more hollow as they struggle with the questions around their new insights.

The choices are difficult - if they do decide to leave, and go into self imposed exile, they are labeled backsliders. If they go to another church, they are church hoppers who will never settle in one place. Or if they find others of like heart and together explore

something new, they are radicals, cultish, even heretical.

So it is back to the question at the beginning - 'What is the difference between a martyr and a prophet?' The answer: A generation.

Today there is more hope for the "leaving types". The "Church" is slowly beginning to realise that for so long they have misunderstood the "leaving types" and are now beginning to recognise their prophetic voice.

The glory days of Christendom have come to an end and the world is best described as hostile to the Christian message. There is a mistrust of institutions, whether it is the Church or Governments. And yet there is a hunger, a deep longing for a meaningful spirituality.

Therefore I pray the "Church" will engage with the "leaving types" as they seek innovative ways to be the new "Church" to the new age to come.

Two closing thoughts:

If the "Church" just batten downs the hatches and tries to wait out the storm, it is only going to end up blown off it's already uncertain course and find itself in the depths of uncharted sea, if not shipwrecked on a deserted island.

If you are a "leaving type", don't hide your light. Shine, so that others can be drawn to you and together find innovative ways to help the "Church" interact with this topsy turvy world.

Jeff Haines

(Originally posted as a blog on his blogsite.
Edited as an article. Used with permission)

The majority basks in the victories won by the few

The few remember the majority who rejected them

"It won't work, you can't where else is it working?..."

The loneliness of a pioneer

Suspicion, misunderstanding, rejection, isolation betrayal

Andrew Wheatley

Thank you to all those who have sent donations towards the costs of the newsletter. There is still plenty of opportunity for those who haven't....

We are currently in the process of having a website set up for Spirited Exchanges. I wonder if you could give me some feedback.... I am looking to find the key words / subjects you might type in to find a site that could be of use to you in your faith journey / struggles outside the church. And what resources would be helpful. If you have any helpful suggestions could you email me on spiritex@central.org.nz

Current Studies of those who leave church

(Alan Jamieson, author of *A Churchless Faith* and *Called Again* gives us up to date feedback about ongoing research in the area of church leavers. He has just returned from a Conference in Germany with other leading researchers in this important area.)

At a recent conference current research in the area of church leavers was discussed. There seem to be two main studies underway. The first is a study which compares 'leavers' with 'stayers'. This study is being undertaken in Germany and the United States and could spread to samples in Britain, and perhaps New Zealand. In this study each leaver who is interviewed and run through a bank of questionnaires is then compared with ten people of comparable age and background who stay within the church. In this way the team of researchers, funded by the German government, are comparing the faith, personality, satisfaction ratings and

whole host of other factors of the leavers in comparison to the stayers. The study is also being used as a major test of the internal validity of Fowler's stages of faith. Preliminary results from the German study are not too far away.

In 1998 Philip Richter and Leslie Francis explored the reasons for leaving in the mainline churches in Great Britain. They compared the results from 27 people who were interviewed and 400 people who answered a questionnaire after being contacted through a telephone survey. The results were published in their book – '*Gone but not forgotten*'. Recently they have repeated this study

with another telephone survey and follow-up questionnaire. Apparently Philip has written his half of a follow-up book and Leslie is trying to get his part finished ASAP. In their first study they found (something which many who receive this newsletter would already know from personal experience), that many church leavers continue to believe in and experience God without belonging to a church and that their spiritual quest persists beyond church

involvement.

While these two major studies are continuing there are also a number of smaller studies happening in the growing area that is loosely being labeled 'deinstitutionalized faith' or 'deinstitutionalized religion'.

As we hear of more information about these studies we'll try and let you know through the newsletter.

**When your options are either
to revise your beliefs
or to reject a person,
look again.**

**Any formula for living
that is too cramped
for the human situation
cries for rethinking.**

**Hard-cover catechisms
are a contradiction
to our loose-leaf lives.**

Dr Gerhard Frost

For any contributions to, or comments you would like to make about the newsletter or if you would like to come off the mailing list please write to the Editor: **Jenny McIntosh at P.O. Box 11551, Wellington** or on email: spiritex@central.org.nz or jenny@central.org.nz For Alan Jamieson: alan@central.org.nz or aj@paradise.net.nz (Note change of email addresses)