

February 25th, 2010

Hereby perceive we the love of God,
because he laid down his life for us: and we
ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
But whoso hath this world's good, and sees
his brother has need, and shuts up his
bowels of compassion from him, how dwells
the love of God in him? 1 John 3:16-17

Dear Friends

During the first week of my teaching career, now 35 years back, a luminary from the GC arrived with due fanfare, spent 20 minutes back slapping and glad handing, offered a few words of encouragement then disappeared in the grand manner of his coming. "What was the point of that?" I asked the attendant education director. Aah Brother P "GC men are very perceptive" replied Pastor H. "Enough said," thought I!

Years later another visiting eminence spent days fastidiously evaluating every aspect of our work. In his two hour exit interview, he berated us with no trace of merit. "Those who spend more time, must be less perceptive" I concluded.

This week I had occasion to engage in an equivalent assignment in Lebanon and was again haunted by the immaturity of my youthful assumptions and became acutely aware that the misalignment of sacred service and fiscal frailty is never comfortable for either party.

West Beirut has an intimidating reputation, none-the-less, observing the commitment of teachers serving seven hundred refined Muslim children in crowded conditions, chastened my prejudice. At the crossroad and occasional flashpoint of competing religions, the Head explained limitations on the expression of faith, but demonstrated how the essence of the gospel is shared through drama and music. What could be more poignant? The encounter challenged me to evaluate my perceptive antenna.

What does it mean to be 'perceptive'? Text books are full of theories, however an idea I found appealing was: the capacity to integrate and reconcile the nuances of a new situation into a rich ecology of prior experience. We never know how useful our history might be!

On the way home, reading a freebie *Economist*, I came upon an article that compared the approach of JP Morgan who survived the credit crunch almost unscathed with UBS, which did not. The latter based its investment decisions solely on 'the numbers', whereas the former exercises a broader spectrum of awareness that evaluates the merits of the enterprise associated with each investment decision. Clearly, breadth and variety of perceptive capacity is critical to our current well being.

Back home, the immediacy of data, clutter and conflict somehow dulls the perception of local opportunity. Would it be that we pray for 'open eyes' to recognise opportunities for peace, justice, mercy and the exercise of grace.

Thank you yet again for your commitment to hear the hurt of the hurting, and perceive hope for the hopeful.

Best regards

Victor.