

CONFERENCE ART AND CARTOON CREATIVE IMAGING

A PICTURE WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS?

Chris Levison

Abstract: Non verbal communication has a long tradition. Pictures can display emotion, argument, describe feelings and point out things which are true or false, in a unique way. Cartoons in particular are accessible and invite reaction and understanding, have the ability to enthral and a lightness of touch. In this article the author explores the use of art for meaning, clarity and faith communities giving examples and comments on examples of cartoon creative imaging by Graham Ogilvie: graphic artist for a national conference A Seamless Transition: Spirituality in NHSScotland (NHSScotland 2003).

Key words : conference art, cartoon creative imaging, spiritual care, non threatening, communication

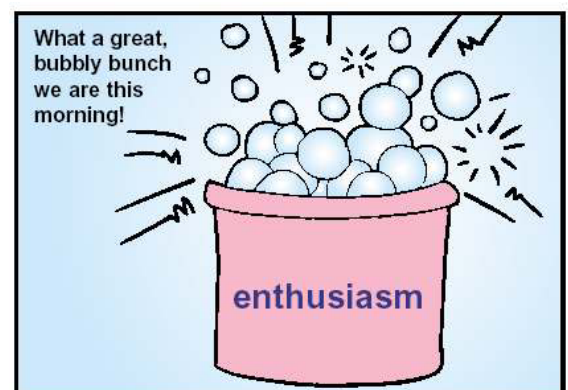
If you ask an artist to explain a picture, he or she will eventually say “If I could adequately explain it, I wouldn’t have had to paint it”. In our media hungry world, every article in the newspaper and every new idea on the television is accompanied by a picture. We are a visual people and what we see has every bit as much of an impact on us as what we hear.

Art and religion is a huge subject. It has been used positively, from huge frescoes within magnificent architecture, to small icons for prayer and meditation. Its absence in buildings so plain that nothing distracts, has also been a visual statement, and the content of art work has to be limited in some faith communities.

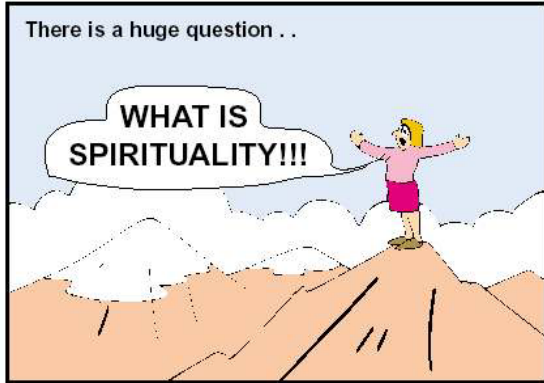
Spiritual Care is also in the world of communication, not only what we communicate, but how we do it. It involves feelings, emotions, relating, affirming, touching, story telling, listening, seeing, as well as praying, meditating and thinking. It is about what happens at every level of our being, from humour to deep emotions and passing moments. It is about the oil which allows our social relationships to work smoothly and it is the very reason of our being, where our hopes lie cheek by jowl with our fears. St Francis encouraged his students to preach all the time, and if they really must, they could use words.

It was during a conference in Hamilton as part of the chairman’s duties I was asked to explain that there would be graphic artists trying to capture the essence of the day. I moved from wondering to admiring, as the delegates crowded round to see what the artist was hearing and drawing. And so when Graham Ogilvie agreed to be artist at the “Seamless-Transition” conference I believed and hoped that his contribution would be significant. We were not disappointed (NHSScotland 2003).

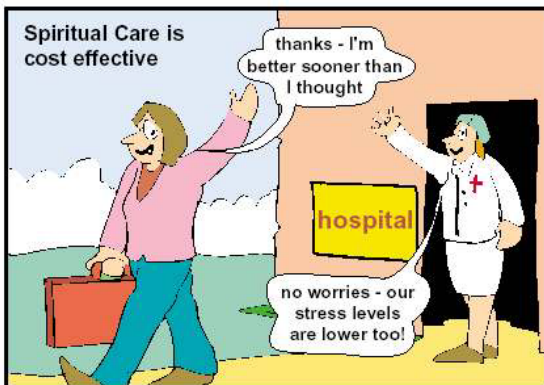
Little did Anne Jarvie, the Chief Nursing Officer, realise, that her throw away remark as to what a bubbly crowd the delegates were, would become a pictorial logo for the day.



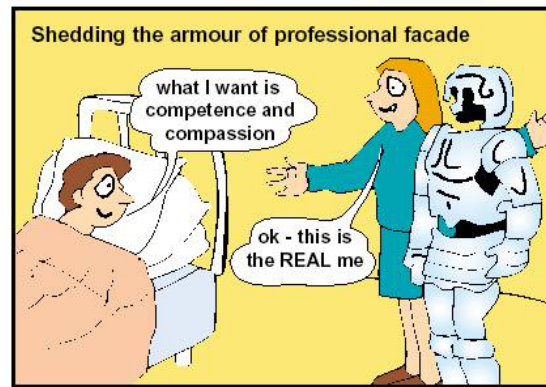
To say that spirituality is a huge subject and its definition a hugely difficult thing to agree upon, was graphically underlined by the mountain top declaration "What is Spirituality?"



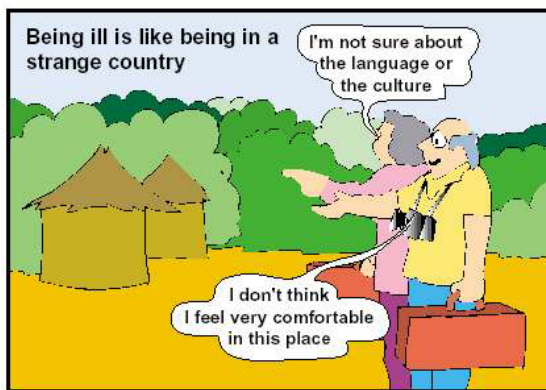
A picture can contain a remarkable amount of closely argued material. To say that the speed and quality of recovery is enhanced as well as the morale of staff in a way that breaks no bank was all encapsulated in one cartoon.



The suggestion that being in a hospital bed with a frightening medical difficulty is like being in a lifeboat with a tiger is easily pictured, (see *Life of Pi* (Martel 2003)), but to step outside the armour of one's professional façade (Cassidy 1994), is even more effective.



Illness as a foreign country is well pictured :



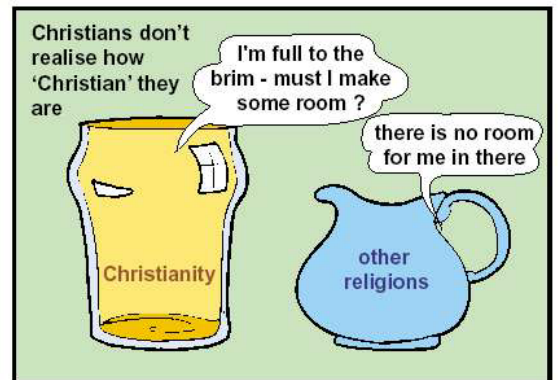
And if spirituality is as fundamental to people as the core is to an apple, a symbol of health, then it is easily remembered.



A picture of a shop selling health makes it perfectly plain that health is a different kind of commodity. The picture jars and makes so obvious what an academic might take pages to write, or how hollow the promise of a chancellor of the exchequer, that increased spending will automatically bring increased health for the population.



A pint glass and a jug may remind us of the need to create space in order to be culturally inclusive, and the natural banter and care in the cartoon of a cleaner can remind us of the spontaneity of much good spiritual care, or, if we wish to put it differently/ theologically, the reality of the incarnational God in the midst of the most human situations.



One of the potential dangers of professionalising chaplaincy is that the spontaneous acts of relationship become carefully rehearsed elements of some clinical protocol. Pictures, cartoons in particular, have an impact which, like music, is totally non-threatening, and invites the viewer to interpret as he or she wills. It is automatically person centred in a way which draws out an understanding by way of recognising something which is true. One can respond or not to a picture.

Pictures can do "emotions" and "journeys" so well.



At a conference I attended recently, the speaker was quite inspiring on the subject of his experience of chaplaincy in the correctional services in Canada. The thought he left me with however was universal. It was a picture, a cartoon which said much about institutions, churches, etc. It was a picture of a couple of men pulling a cart up a hill. The cart had square wheels so they were having a hard time, and the cart was fully loaded, and you could see what it was carrying. It was carrying round wheels, which reminds us, ... but the picture says it better than the most adequate explanation.

The parables of Jesus were pictures as well as stories. They show us real people doing ordinary things which enlighten us as to what God is like, searching for a sheep, looking out for a long lost son, finding a pearl of great price or holding a banquet to which all are invited. When the Pharisees brought a woman caught committing adultery, Jesus became something of a graphic artist, he drew or wrote with his finger on the ground, invited the faultless one to cast the first stone, then drew on the ground again. One by one they went away. Now that's a picture I would love to see.

People respond to cartoons, like they do to spiritual care where it is well delivered. They may not have the inspirational qualities of an icon or a great piece of art, but they can carry important messages and are a friendly form of communication.



The conference participants were quite enthralled by the art work as it grew out of the day and there has been much positive feedback. I know the artist has been used by some of the people who first met him and his work at the event. There is a huge educational task concerning the content, the availability, and the breadth of spiritual care. The light touch of the cartoon is not inappropriate to the approach of a spiritual care giver, inviting the person to engage at whatever level they choose and in a language which is readily accessible. Many of the cartoons have been lifted and used in presentations, such is the immediacy and value of a picture.

Acknowledgement

The editors record their thanks to the artist Graham Ogilvie for his permission to reproduce the images used in this article. Graham Ogilvie has been specialising in Cartoon Creative Visioning for 8 years. Cartoons can be redrawn, digitised, emailed after the event and put on the internet. All the above images are copyright free. The complete set of art from the Seamless Transition Conference (NHSScotland 2003) is available in colour at : http://www.chaplains.co.uk/seamless_01.htm
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