

HOW ARGENTINES RESIST THE GOSPEL

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When we present the Gospel, we want it to be both intellectually plausible and existentially credible. In other words, the evangelical message must be believable, within the realm of possibility, and it must be livable, demonstrable. (In this sense, we are living examples of the Bible to non-believers, for good and bad).

There are four kinds of obstacles to plausibility and credibility:

Intellectual: objections concerning the exclusivity of Christian faith, perplexity about suffering and evil, and resistance to the Bible's authority

Personal: experiences with suffering, injustice, and evil which cause us to question God's goodness, power, justice, or wisdom

Spiritual: the impact of sin upon how we think and demonic oppression

Social: customs, values, and practices of the family, group, clan, tribe, ethnic group, gender, or nation

So, what class of objections characterize Argentine resistance to the Gospel? Is it intellectual: Catholicism (ecclesiology and doctrine), existentialism or pragmatism, for instance? Is it trauma due to personal and collective tragedy, such as, social and economic instability or the Dirty War? Is it spiritual: salvation through works, occult flirtation, or sect participation? Or, are the chief obstacles to the Gospel in Argentina social in origin?

According to my students in a recent course on apologetics that I taught, the answer is -- social. Resistance to the Gospel here is rooted in social customs, values, and practices, more than in intellectual arguments or encounters with evil and injustice.

With much candor they listed the following weaknesses and characteristics of Argentine culture that inhibit the Gospel, as well as discipleship:

Superstition: Many are drawn to cults and mystical experience. Others are prone to accept whatever conspiracy theory seems most compelling.

Pride-shame dynamic: On the one hand, Argentines believe they are the apex of all South American people, much more sophisticated than the Chileans and Colombians, certainly much better than the Paraguayans or Bolivians. On the other hand, shame expresses itself in phrases like, "This country is a disaster!" and "We are a third world country." Couple this with a sometimes explicit antipathy to North America and Europe. So, pride prevents openness and shame inhibits initiative.

Relationships: Social life demands much greater allegiance than even the church. If there is an important football game or birthday party, for example, church attendance, Bible study or small group meetings will be neglected.

Laziness (including intellectual lethargy and lack of curiosity, as well as passively accepting the status quo): My students expressed shame and frustration with the lack of commitment, willingness to sacrifice, or the ability to follow-through or follow-up as

crucial obstacles to think about or act upon the Gospel or in discipleship. In this connection they mentioned the phenomena of being a "Chanta".

Of course, obstacles to the Gospel and hindrances to spiritual growth vary among economic, educational, and geographical classes. Is your perspective different than my students? Or, do the issues raised by them seem generally valid across all segments of Argentine society?