WHAT IS SOCIALIZATION FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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Category: Observations

I hope no one thinks I'm trivialising a very important and sad series of events; that is certainly not my intention. However, some remarks made by the policeman in charge of the Shannon Matthews case (for background information see here) have really struck me today.Â Chief Constable Norman Bettinson said of Shannon's mother:

> *in his experience Shannon's family were "people who actually don't socialise beyond a small group of people... no holidays, no going to town, no going to the cinema - if it doesn't go on in their house, or a house nearby it doesn't happen as far as they're concerned.*
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> *"They aren't socialised in the way that society is generally socialised in terms of norms of behaviour." (more)*
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> *He said their normal standard of behaviour was "whatever they could get away with".*

Please note, he went out of his way to state that Shannon's family were not in the slightest representative of the community in the area where they lived.

The idea of socialization struck me very firmly. According to the Chief Constable, the fact that Karen Matthews only mixed with a very limited group of people, all of whom thought like her meant that she didn't know how to behave in normal society. All socieities have unwritten rules which govern how we interact and which help to smooth out the problems that occur when human beings bump up against each other physically and metaphorically. Apparently, Karen Matthews was either unaware of these rules, or she felt that they did not apply to her. Because her experience of human society was so limited, she did not know how to interact.

What struck me about this, is that if you rejigged the chief constable's comments a little, they could apply to most Christians. We don't go beyond our own denominational boundaries, we don't mix with people who are different to us...

Because, as Christians, we rarely have dealings with people who are different to us, we become entrenched in our views and start to believe that the way we perceive the Gospel is the only possible way that the Gospel can be perceived. I wonder whether so many of the divisions that have typified the Church down through the centuries are not due (at least in part) to inadequate socialization. Yes, there are things we might want to disagree on (baptism, church government and such) but the degree of vituperation and division that has been generated (and which is still generated) is out of all proportion to the issues. Perhaps we need to be continually stepping outside of our ecclesiastical neighbourhoods and letting ourselves experience how Christians from other backgrounds do things. Of course if we do this, we might end up with theology which becomes a little messed up.