

THE
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THE PROBLEMS OF PREJUDICE

DEAR FRIENDS:

Fixed opinions are obstacles to the advancement of most worthwhile causes. They may have little or no foundation in fact, but they exert a dictatorial power over the mind and emotions. Although prejudice is largely the result of environmental pressures, it seems to arise within ourselves and to go against it is an act of treason. Prejudice is present in all stratas of society and among all races. Education has little effect upon opinionism, in fact, it may strengthen and support unreasonable mental attitudes. It is a burden upon our political system making it difficult to judge a candidate impartially. Prejudice cannot be supported philosophically, nor can it be sustained scientifically. It has blocked more progress than any other single factor and is especially powerful in blocking new ideas or opposing reforms. Prejudice contributes little more than discomfort to the life of the average citizen. He is placed continually upon the defensive and feels it his moral duty to contradict anyone who differs from him. As a result, he has few friends and an ever increasing number of enemies. Such an individual cannot actually be honest to himself. It is his moral duty to demolish any beliefs or attitudes contrary to his own. There are few prejudices that are not detrimental to family relationships and personal happiness.

An old clergyman I once knew spent most of his spare time condemning something or some one. He nearly always had a good Bible phrase to justify his criticisms. After he had spent half an hour listing his objections about his next door neighbor, it seemed appropriate to remind the minister that the Good Book said, "Judge not lest ye be judged." He turned on me rather belligerently remarking, "Those words should not have been in the Bible, they are not inspired." Holy Writ is a great comfort to the prejudiced and can provide support and consolation for almost any attitude. Christendom is now divided into a number of sects differing mostly by interpretation. Each interpretation is in turn based upon a sanctified opinion.

Many years ago, I was involved in an organization called the World Fellowship of Faith. Delegates from a number of countries gathered with local clergy to work out some kind of a plan for better inter-religious understanding. It was admitted that it would be extremely difficult to establish peace on earth

while man's spiritual convictions remained militantly competitive. A number of the delegates discovered that a fellowship of faiths implied more than an assemblage of clergymen belonging exclusively to Christian sects. One of the first facts that became evident was that these assorted clerics were completely uninformed as to each other's doctrines. They met as strangers dedicated to the service of God but with very little solid ground to support a meeting of the minds. When it came time to formalize the structure, each delegate assumed that his own denomination or religion would dominate the assembly.

In a number of instances prejudice was too strong to permit any type of cooperation. Several of the delegates stated firmly that they could not fraternize or work with followers of false doctrines. Their faith was the only true one, and their interpretation was the best. To ask them to be tolerant to other sects was to deny the true God and this they could not and would not do. Some small progress was accomplished and the few liberals made enduring friendships. In general, however, the religious congress simply consisted of each delegate reading a prepared paper and ignoring the remarks of other delegates. The whole affair was a dramatic example of prejudice.

It is some forty years since the above-mentioned effort to improve religious relationships. It is good to report that there has been great improvement, especially in the nineteen sixties and seventies. The word heresy is seldom mentioned; leaders of non-Christian groups are now treated with courtesy, and most of the denominations have markedly liberalized. The major denominations of Christianity reconciled their differences as in the case of the long-existing feud between the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. It is also noticeable that Christian minorities in other religious areas are well received and Eastern religious leaders are recognized and respected. However, there are still some areas where prejudice is stirring up religious conflict with fanatical propaganda.

It seems to me that the laws of God, as revealed to mankind, are the same everywhere. The principal differences are matters of language rather than of concepts. Religions are spiritual nations. Their followings constitute their citizenry. The structure of their faiths provides their political type of government. Theoretically, at least, we respect other nations, and when we travel to foreign countries we accept the laws and rules of the regions and may wish that we could speak their languages. In nature there is an infinite diversity which is wise and proper. All flowers do not have the same color nor do they flourish in the same climate. We cannot say that one species is superior to another because they are all proper manifestations of one life fulfilling its proper destiny. Why can't we feel the same about religion? All proper faiths bestowed by prophets upon their peoples are expressions of the infinite love and wisdom of a Divine Power. Each has been adapted to the culture group to which it has been given. It fulfills the need of the believer and helps him to grow until he reaches a degree of enlightenment which transcends all sectarian limitations.

Pythagoras taught that Deity is best represented by the number one as the symbol of unity. Unity as Deity cannot be divided or separated or thrown into opposition with itself. Division takes place within unity but the unity itself circumscribes all of its parts and these are finally returned to their original nature which is God. Humanity is a unity in which all human beings

are parts; nations are unities within the greater unity of the earth itself. Religions are units within the greater unity of spiritual truth. All divisions are imaginary and to a measure dangerous. A prejudice is always a separating force. It divides things from each other by odious comparisons. It creates antagonisms and perpetuates ancient grievances. In the smaller world of personal affairs, prejudices are easily exploited. Leaders with ulterior motives cater to the inconsistencies of human thinking and emphasize dislikes, thus converting thoughtless persons who do not realize that they are being imposed upon. Today everyone is tied into a pattern of dissension and discord. We must sometime realize that our weaknesses are used against us. Prejudice is a flaw in our defense armament and as such weakens us individually and collectively.

The best cure for prejudice is the strengthening of insight. We must cease using general terms which are untrue but can support our preconception. Human beings must be judged as individuals and upon their own integrities. Until we know the real truth of a matter, we cannot afford to pass judgment upon it. The better informed we become, the less prejudiced we are. When we know the individual we have decided to condemn, we may discover unsuspected virtues. After a few experiences with persons we have decided to dislike, it is probable that we will be more tolerant.

There is an interesting story about an English clergyman who decided to annihilate astrology. He gave a number of venomous sermons on the topic and having run out of ammunition decided to explore the matter first hand. He met a number of dignified astrologers, learned how to set and read a horoscope and never mentioned the subject again publicly. It is said that he practiced astrology himself as a sideline. There have been many cases in which prejudice has been cleared away by improved knowledge. If it happens that we find a natural tendency to downgrade comparative strangers "on general principles" we should make it our concern to know these persons and find out if possible how they developed the prejudices which we find objectionable. They may be partly right and a sharing of information will be beneficial to both. Sometimes prejudice becomes the basis of a career. Having decided that something is wrong, we resolve to correct the situation at all costs. It may be that like Don Quixote we are lancing a windmill. Having estimated incorrectly we discover that we have wasted time and effort on an unnecessary cause. There is no essential progress in judging people to be worse than they are, but by judging them to be better than they seem to be, they may be inspired to live up to your estimate.

Most sincerely and gratefully yours,

Mandy P. Hall



PRS
ARTS OF THE WORLD
GIFT SHOP

Many of our friends will be happy to learn that the PRS is improving its facilities. We are working from a plan prepared by a "space man." In case you are not familiar with this type of engineering, we should point out that a space man is not a visitor from another planet, but a specialist in assisting organizations to make the best possible use of their premises.

The first obvious result of his counseling is the moving of our gift and book shop. The new location is directly across from the entrance to our auditorium; visitors can now view the interesting displays through large picture windows and there are no stairs to climb. There is a special book nook with selected publications in the field of our interests, and we feel that strangers will become better aware of the aesthetic and cultural aspects of our work.

Incidentally, a large part of our stock has been in storage for some time. With the new arrangement some very scarce material will be on view and there will also continue to be new shipments from the Orient; a number of recent purchases will be arriving in the next few weeks. Drop in to our ARTS OF THE WORLD GIFT AND BOOK SHOP before or after lectures, or at other times when you can explore available treasures at greater leisure.

BOOK NOOK

