

FOREWORD

I am grateful to the Editors of this important book, Prejudice, U.S.A., for their kindness in requesting me to present a Foreword. Much of what I say here will be said again at greater length, and probably better, in the various chapters that follow. My own emphasis will be theological and tempered by eleven years of viewing the practical results of prejudice as a Charter Member of the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

Americans are a practical people. We tend to study the effects of prejudice, mainly discrimination, or its most visible and perhaps most virulent American form, white racism, rather than focus our consideration of the cause of all this, which is prejudice. The great value of this book is that it goes to the root of the problem, prejudice, and considers what might be done to eradicate this basic attitude, particularly by the churches, schools, business, labor, mass media, and governmental agencies.

There is perhaps no quality of human life that lends itself more to self-delusion than prejudice. We all think we know what it is and, unfailingly, we absolve ourselves of its presence or effects in our lives. No one really wants to be prejudiced, but almost everyone is prejudiced, and only the most honest person will admit it, reluctantly and without pride.

I am hopeful that if we might only understand what prejudice really is, how deeply and subtly evil, how persuasive and omnipresent, that this understanding might be half the cure. Hopefully, this book

leads us in that direction. As the book suggests, once understood, we must seek out effective and creative ways of eliminating prejudice on the personal and social levels, by every effective means available.

Prejudice in the theological context is often referred to as rash judgment. Fundamentally, this means passing judgment, normally detrimental or negative, on some one or some group, without sufficient evidence to justify the judgment -- hence rash judgment. In his classic book on the nature of prejudice, Gordon Allport quotes Charles Lamb: "I confess that I do feel the differences of mankind, national and individual I am, in plainer words, a bundle of prejudices -- made up of likings and dislikings -- the veriest thrall to sympathies, apathies, antipathies".

There is perhaps no nation on earth where it is easier to be a "bundle of prejudices" than our own America which is such an amalgam of religions, races, nationalities, and colors. There is no more noble human experiment in the world than the challenge of the motto on our coins: "E pluribus unum" -- despite our vast ethnic mixture, our long history of black-white, Mexican American-Anglo, Protestant-Catholic, Jewish-Gentile antipathies.

What makes prejudice so spiritually dangerous is the rashness and irrationality of all that it brings in its train: fear, suspicion, dislike, disdain, revulsion, hatred -- all unfounded, and all leading inevitably and irrationally to discrimination, social disunity, and the denial of human dignity.

What makes prejudice difficult to understand, much less to cope with or to cure, is that it is a generalized feeling that goes beyond

values, interests, and knowledge. A prejudiced person feels antipathy or hostility towards another or a whole group without any definable or sufficient reason, and then attempts to justify himself by saying he is just upholding his special values, or his interests, or even some imagined or presumed facts. This generalized feeling of prejudice easily encompasses a whole group, and then denigrates any single identifiable member of the group without any prior reference to the individual quality or merit or value of the person discriminated against so automatically. Hence the theological categorizing of prejudice as rash judgment upon a person or a group.

One should distinguish rash or prejudicial from erroneous judgment. Shown the factual error of our other judgments, most of us will change our judgments willingly enough. Not so with prejudice. Demonstrate one erroneous base of prejudicial judgment, and the prejudiced person will quickly find two or three other bases. Shifting the base is no problem for prejudice because it puts out false roots in all directions. Destroy one; there is always another. Demonstrate that Negroes are not biologically or genetically or humanly inferior, then they become condemned as lazy for not developing their talents. Prejudice, therefore, is not only faulty, but also inflexible judgment, characterized more by emotion than reason, and almost always accompanied by some degree of discriminatory action against the person or the group who is the object of personal prejudice.

Prejudice is best described as the poison of personal relations, the most divisive element of our society, the most corrosive element of

our human nature, since it goes against reason and falsifies our judgments of other persons, makes us and others the prey of irrational fears and hostilities.

One of the most damning aspects of prejudice is that we are not born with it. We learn it; we develop it; and we pass it on to others. How does it all begin? Basically, because of a difference and a comparison. The difference may be many things -- color, language, religion, social or economic situation, physical appearance, even sex. Following the difference is an evaluation and a comparison. What we have is good or the best, therefore anything different is inferior or bad. Even historical circumstance -- war, oppression, conquest, slavery -- can be the condition for the birth or growth of prejudice against a whole group and each of its members, now and for all time: Jew and Arab, Western and Oriental, Irish and English, German and French, Northerner and Southerner in dozens of countries, Korea, Viet Nam, and our own -- all these have seen prejudice against each other be born, and develop, and get passed on to each succeeding generation.

How is this done? Allport outlines two main methods: Categorization and stereotyping. We naturally categorize as we sort out our knowledge by generalization. Then we easily attribute unfavorable qualities to this or that category of human beings, form senseless stereotypes that we irrationally and without evidence apply across the board, and prejudice is born: All Jews are sly, all Negroes are lazy, all Catholics are politically ambitious, all Chinese are cruel, and, of course, all our kind -- whatever we happen to be -- are the best and to be preferred over

all others of whatever religion, race, nationality, or color -- this last reality, positive prejudice for one's own group, which the theologian would call pride, being mainly ethnocentrism in the terminology of the sociologists.

Now we begin to see prejudice as much more than an individual quality. It becomes an integral part of a religion, race, nationality, color, or ultimately, culture. Prejudice in this sense gets passed on to all members of the society or culture, in the family, in the neighborhood, in the school, even alas, in the church. It is now apparent how virulent a reality we are dealing with in prejudice. It is propagated in the very process of acculturation, education, and socialization within one's social group. No inside force, part of one's culture, opposes it. No outside force can normally oppose it without seeming to be inimical to one's culture, nationality, religion, or race, and we are all very touchy on these matters. I am, of course, overstating the case, but you will agree that unconsciously we are all in some fashion "bundles of prejudice", all of which we have acquired since birth, not from Martians, but from those with whom we have lived. In a very real sense, to divest ourselves and our future generations from prejudice will require a profound cultural change in our attitudes, a change from within. Few forces can bring this about. Those that can and should are our great social institutions, churches, schools, business and labor, mass media and governmental agencies.

Here, I would like to add a word about one of these great social institutions, the church, about which I can speak from more personal

experience, concern, and commitment. The ultimate values of a society are mostly expressed in the form of religious beliefs. Negatively, religion has been at the heart of much prejudice -- the conflict of Jew and Christian, Orthodox and Roman Catholic, Protestant and Catholic, Mohammedan and Christian, just to mention some of our most basic historical forms of prejudice and discrimination in the Western World. Ethnocentric pride has almost always had a religious base and has often focused on cultural practices relating to religion. Moreover, people have often portrayed religious differences in the worst possible light, or have used their own religious beliefs in defense of their most cherished secular values, even when these were largely economic or cultural or social, and not religious at all, such as the purity of their neighborhood.

I think it must be said that until very recently the most segregated hour of the week in the South was eleven o'clock Sunday morning in church. Parochial schools in the South, while perfectly free to desegregate, generally did so only shortly before, just with, or in a few cases, just after the public schools. I can recall being asked some years ago at Stellenbosch University in South Africa what I thought of the stance of the Dutch Reformed Church there in support of Apartheid. I could only answer accurately with one word, blasphemous.

Four years ago, the Commission on Civil Rights had a ten-day hearing in Jackson, Mississippi. At the end of several days of gruesome testimony, I had the unenviable task of conducting, on television, a seminar of the religious leaders of the State. I reviewed for them what horrible testimony we had heard regarding man's inhumanity to man in Mississippi. "These acts of murder, arson, and brutality", I noted,

"were committed by those who attend your churches and synagogues. Why cannot you get together and speak out together against this perversity?" One high churchman suggested that they would all be expelled from the State if they spoke out forcefully. Yet there was no alternative. Ethnocentric pride and perversion must be combated from within the culture. Two great acts have made religious witness vital and forceful in all ages: prophecy and martyrdom. Religious leaders must be perfectly clear in going against popular opinion when it is morally wrong -- that is the essence of prophecy, to point out the blasphemy of prejudice before the tide has turned, not afterward, and to be willing to be a martyr for this most important religious truth. It calls for heroic courage at times, but if religion is to lead and not to follow, there is no other way than the courageous way of prophecy and martyrdom.

This may be a good place to reiterate that there can be no real doubt about the position of the Christian Churches vis-a-vis prejudice towards any other human being. When queried about the most important of all moral laws, Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself". (Mark 12:30-31) This second aspect of the law is confirmed in the Old Testament, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor". (Exod. 20:16) And in the New Testament, "Whatsoever you do for one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me". Jesus identifies Himself in our neighbor and in our treatment of our least brethren, especially if he should be hungry, thirsty, naked, or in prison. All men are equal as children of God, Our Father; all human beings have equal dignity and an equal eternal destiny; despite the differences of talent or grace, all deserve our interest, understanding, and help, especially the least brethren. The Son of God became man that all might

have life and have it more abundantly. Salvation and redemption are for all, not a chosen few. We will only be known as His disciples if we love one another as He has loved us. (John 13:35)

The whole thread of Christian anthropology is one of equal spiritual and human dignity before God and men, a dignity that must be respected and buttressed by the same love by which God loves us and we Him. As St. Paul says: We are one Body in Jesus Christ: He is the Head and we are the members. What we think and do for others, we think and do for Him. If we despise and disregard them, His least brethren, we despise and disregard Him. There is no other alternative. Human dignity is universal and so must be our respect for every human person made in the image and likeness of God.

The unity of the human race, as an ideal and a fundamental belief, is central to all the Christian Churches. To think otherwise is to be unchristian, even if the one or ones about whom one thinks otherwise be not Christians.

There was a day, not so distant, when there was much ambiguity in the actual practice of the Churches, especially as enunciated by their leaders. No more. There are, of course, pockets of resistance, but on balance never before has the testimony of the Christian leadership been clearer or more forceful. In some way, Christian leaders seem to be overcompensating for the lack of leadership in the past. A Father Groppi asks to go to jail with the Negro youth of Milwaukee, and the Chaplain of Yale does go to jail in Baltimore with his wife and the mother of Massachusetts' Governor, Mrs. Peabody.

This change has come none too soon. There is still a gap in the followership -- Catholics of earlier minorities throw stones at Father Groppi and even at the nuns marching with him who also teach their children. Even so, the corner has been turned. The question is no longer "whether to", but "how" and "when" and "where" to testify on behalf of those who suffer prejudice and discrimination.

How does the church do it? Many ways.

It all begins by education -- preachment if you will, but this is just a beginning. Today, more than ever before, the word must be joined to the act, an act of all religious persons in the local community, working together to end prejudice and the fruits of prejudice. There is no limit to the scope of this collaboration for justice and charity and social unity and peace.

In this matter of social justice, all religious leaders, all religious people, and even non-religious leaders of good will, can and should speak together with one voice, and should devise all manner of programs for working together for social justice, for all people, in neighborhoods, in cities and villages, in sections and states, all across the country. The battle against prejudice may indeed be nationwide, but the point of contact is local.

If, as the recent Report of the Kerner Commission commented, the root cause of disturbance in our cities is white racism and all the sad effects that derive from it, poor housing, poor education, poor employment, hopelessness and frustration for most American Negroes, then each local community must do its own work of local diagnosis:

how strong is white racism in this particular neighborhood, or section, or city? How is it practically manifested in the area of housing, education, jobs, administration of justice, and public services? How then does one get at the roots of white racism?

Certainly everything we have said of prejudice applies to white racism which judges rashly every single Negro, man, woman, and child, and judges him or her badly, irrationally, emotionally, blindly, and inflexibly -- just because of his or her color. Personal and social injustice is wider spread and more immediate here because of the visibility of color -- a factor most often not present in other earlier types of American prejudice based on religion or nationality.

If love of God and love of neighbor are inseparably joined as the sum of the Christian message, then this matter of racial prejudice which induces hatred, hostility, and blind discrimination towards our Negro and other minority neighbors becomes the No. 1 sin of Christians in our day and a matter of highest priority for all who call themselves Christians, both leaders and members of the church, all being bound equally by the same supreme law, all presumably heading towards the same unsegregated goal of eternal glory.

Here the solution must transcend words and even attitudes. Each person must personalize the solution by his individual contribution to it. No one can insulate or separate himself from this national problem. No one is an island, as John Donne said. All must work together with those against whom the prejudice is mainly directed. A solution here cannot come from on high for Negroes -- it must be worked out, on the

local level, with Negroes. Prejudice only really disappears when it is supplanted by personal respect and friendship, which grow out of working and living together, engaged in a common cause, at times inspired by the same religious conviction. I would suspect any white person who just spoke well of Negroes without ever having lived or worked with Negroes, had Negro friends and associates. The same, of course, could be said of other groups we have mentioned in the context of mutual prejudice -- Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Gentiles, Spanish-speaking Americans and Anglos. The Protestants and Catholics of war-time Germany really found fellowship and friendship and a true ecumenical spirit for the first time in some 400 years when they suffered together under Hitler and died together for a common cause, bore a common shame for what the Nazis did to the Jews.

It is true that many organizations assist this process of getting diverse groups working together in America -- NAACP, NCCJ, and others, but I suspect that personal religious conviction can reach more deeply into individual lives, attitudes, and actions, than simple membership in such organizations, good though they be. I have seen too many people who speak one way in public, on the platform, and quite another way in the back room, in their kitchens and clubs.

I would like to conclude on a note of modest and moderate optimism. Whatever the past poor performance of religion in the struggle against prejudice in its many forms, I deeply believe that there are many good signs at work for the future elimination of much prejudice in the United States. First of all, in the matter of religious prejudice, this seems

to be diminishing greatly, if not disappearing, in this country between large groupings of Catholics and Protestants. The Jewish-Gentile tension seems to dissolve more slowly, particularly in certain areas of higher Jewish concentration. However, I find very few people proud or easy with their anti-Semitism any more. Maybe the Nazis unwittingly did us that service -- who could possibly want to be associated with the Nazis.

Helpfully, a key attitude in ecumenism today is to try to understand everyone else's religious values, even though they may differ in form or expression from one's own. Moreover, there has almost disappeared the isolated religious approach to secular problems of interracial justice and human development. We all accept today the idea that each religious group must, together with all other religious groups, and even with those who profess no religion, bring the best of its spiritual and moral strength to bear upon this common problem of prejudice that infects us and threatens to destroy the vitals of our civil society and civic peace.

I said earlier that the churches and religion are only one of the social institutions that can work effectively to eradicate prejudice and its malevolent effects. This book studies other institutions that can and should do the same, and suggests a host of cross-institutional efforts. After all, the same person belongs to many institutions. I am a priest, an educator, an employer, a mass communicator, and a citizen.

As a member of all these great social institutions, I would like to conclude by commending the Editors and authors of Prejudice, U.S.A.

for their leadership in focusing the attention of Americans on the root cause of what they so rightly call "our most virulent social disease". One would hope that the concluding suggestion of this book for a "National Foundation Against Prejudice and Discrimination" will receive thoughtful consideration from all who wish to see a better America, freed from this ancient blight of prejudice.

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President, University of Notre Dame