

The Cradle of Mental Liberty

Manly P. Hall (transcript from lecture, April 27 1952)

Just to keep our minds more or less balanced during election year we have to realize if we look back, each time this critical period approaches there is a deluge of propaganda of one kind or another. With a systematic program of disorientation as part of the political phenomena as we know it, It is the duty of each individual who wishes to be a solid and sound citizen to keep his mind clear during these critical months. After all, the purpose of a great deal of conflicting propaganda is confusion.

Those whom the Gods would destroy they first make mad, and to a certain degree the individual who has lost his own center of thinking is most likely to be swept away in some propaganda program. This propaganda may not all of it be actually insidious; in a sense it is almost completely an internal affair.

But in these days of international pressures internal unity is greatly to be desired, yet through our political system, internal division prior to election is almost inevitable. Therefore, it is a very wise person indeed who continues to think straight regardless of the confusion that is created around him. Very few of us are in a position to estimate correctly the causes or these confused reports that go by grapevine means throughout our entire social structure.

A few days ago, a book came to my desk, I, am not going' to name it or the author, but it was and is one of these books of confusion. The individual who reads it will come to the end not inspired to make a contribution to a need, but with a complete sense of panic By the time the book is finished there are no institutions, individuals, patterns, laws, structures in our civilization that are not entirely corrupt. The individual is left in a position where any possible contribution he could make is worthless and useless by the very nature of the book itself'.

I read it rather thoughtfully, it contained a number of old saws that have been in circulation for the last seventy-five years in this country, but it was definitely a disintegrating, document. It gave nothing that helped, and yet coming quietly through this threaded structure I noted continually one or two points that seemed to be of interest, and before it was entirely finished the summary was that in this vast structure of complete chaos there was one untouched figure, one noble monument of integrity, and he should be elected. In other words, it was just a plain propaganda book, but done with documentation and cross-documentation until the average person would be utterly bewildered .if he did not pause to study the documentation and find the authorities were no more infallible than the man who quoted them.

The average person will not think these things through and comes to large negatives, and these are the impressions it is intended the public should take. A little investigation indicated that the author of the work was a character of no particular integrity rather unpleasant, and certainly not the kind of man who should have prepared a serious and careful political study. The whole

matter was something that unless the reader were informed and well poised, could do a lot of damage and no good, and while it was crying Americanism to the housetops, actually, it was the kind of writing that would certainly give peace and assistance to the enemy, whoever it might be, simply by contributing to a disintegration of public morale and confidence.

This is the danger of election periods where the works of the individual and his own character and ability are sacrificed to his political programs and parties. Therefore, in these times, and they come around periodically, and with the opportunities and advantages of political prestige at a very high Premium they are maintained even in the intervals between political campaigns and keep us in a more or less constant state of uproar.

Actually, all these pressures are part of a problem of personality integration; the individual must learn to be strong in the presence of the opportunity to be weak, and it is only his own strength and integrity that is an important asset to the world in which he lives.

The moment he falls into any form of defeatist mechanism, he is contributing to a collective defeat. All along through these processes we observe too much defeatism, too much negative thinking. When a person comes with a problem and we study that individual, and he tells us he cannot do this, and that is wrong, and these people are against him and that everything is conspiring to make life difficult for him, the inevitable answer is that he is suffering from a persecution complex. He is suffering not from what is done to him., but from his own fears. I know many individuals who have taken non-existing conditions and ruined their lives with them, simply by the process of being forever afraid.

When it comes to large political thinking, the problem is the same. A great number of individuals develop a phase of the collective persecution complex and live to perpetuate bad news. They live to fight valiantly against shadows. If we find individuals doing it, we know they are in need of mental help, but when great collectives do it we call it patriotism & and nationalism, yet actually it is unhealthful There is nothing more unhealthful in human thinking than either individually or collectively sitting around describing, discussing, and arguing the terrible fatalities that are inevitable.

All that these types of thinking can do are to strengthen our own negative attitudes toward life and make essentially certain we will waste all energies we have in talking and have practically nothing left to accomplish any useful purpose. If we have any faith whatever in the universe in which we live we will remember the thought of Karl Jung that persons past middle life seldom if ever can integrate their personalities unless they have a strong faith. Faith gives us strength and fear bestows weakness; or we might say; fear exhausts the strength resources of the personality. No matter what we fear., whether it is a hole in the dark, a personal devil or communism, the more we think about it and fear it the weaker we become. We merely give comfort to the opposing thought by making it so important in our lives that it paralyzes all useful activity and makes us feel we are truly cooperating with something if we sit around and talk about the magnitude of the enemy.

This type of thinking can never produce any good. The one thing all monopolistic thinking is afraid of is the individual who can do his own thinking. Therefore in the past wherever he

appeared he was promptly burned at the stake, and in modern times every effort is made by the way in which we live to reduce the probability of this individual. The individual always has and always will remain the thorn in the flesh as far as ulterior motives are concerned. Everyone is afraid of him.

If he can be convinced he himself is afraid, then he is removed as a danger, to any collective action of a negative type, so we should not and must not waste our resources in imagining how great our adversaries may be. We are much better off if we use our resources to strengthen our own realization of the kind of values we believe in, and the only way in which we can strengthen these values, is to strengthen them in ourselves.

The longer we work with people the more we realize we cannot depend upon our ability to convert anybody to anything. The only thing we can do with certainty is to make ourselves into a positive force for good; and if enough individuals would do that, instead of working on each other, the collective result would be integrity; whereas, otherwise it is only an approach from exteriors and externals in which we attempt to force our opinion upon those who may not be willing to accept them.

Democracy as we result know it today is not merely a fortuitous institution that originated as a result of the great era of revolutions in Europe; the principle of Democracy is as old as human thinking and the whole motion of the world for the last ten thousand years has been toward it.

In the process of this motion there have been a number of interferences. We went through a long historical record of entrenched minorities or privileged groups opposing the will of the people. The reason this was opposed was because it was profitable to oppose it, not in terms of public good, but in the terms of private advantage. As long as the world continues, there will be the conflict between private advantage and public good. Each individual is, to a degree, an offender, and if his own personal conduct is magnified to become world conduct, conditions would not be much better than they are now. In fact, in many cases they would be worse.

Yet because our own small selfishness seems petty in comparison to larger projects, and because our sphere of influence seems small, we cannot see our own attitude making any important contribution to the world problem. Yet actually, the conflict between private advantage and public good exists in us and is marked in practically every attitude and action that manifests itself in our dispositions.

Thus In history, as in psychology, we have the record of this conflict., and yet we can all conceive, if we have the wit to look, that down through time the public good has been gradually strengthened. There have been periods in which it seemingly was set back but each of these setbacks resulted In a more rapid advancement afterward.

The whole motion of the world is a gradual motion away from tyranny and toward benevolent., cooperative human living. Even as we look back upon what we call "The good old times" we will find there has been progress in the memory of the living.

We know there have been complications; we know there are worries today that others never knew, that we have critical times on our own doorsteps that the ages never experienced. At the same time there has never been a generation as well equipped to handle the problem as we are.

Five thousand years ago one person in every hundred thousand persons could read or write. A thousand years ago one person in approximately a hundred could read or write. Today probably one person out of every five or ten on the entire planet can read or write to some degree. The progress has been consistent and continuous. A hundred years ago there were no public institutions suitable for the needs of the human being. Two hundred years ago hospitals such as we know today did not exist. In looking over the record of human progress we find the humanity of man inevitably triumphing, but not at any time to its full estate; never did we accomplish all things., but we have built, and even the intervention of great military dictators, tyrants and despots of one kind or another were unable to block essential progress. In a nation for a time progress was blocked, but the tremendous wave of the human inevitable, swept away the tyranny and brought these despots to their final ruin...and always will.

Each generation is convinced its own crisis is the most difficult that has ever been experienced in history. In the future when our way of life is read only in text-books, other peoples will be worrying about the crises that confront them., but the whole story is one of an inevitable motion_...and why is that motion, primarily?

Because that motion is man himself', because within the human being., perpetuated from generation to generation by the very processes of perpetuation, there are convictions that we all contain and to a degree obey. These convictions are in substance the freedom of ourselves., the release of our own purposes and convictions., and an irresistible determination to be that 'which we will to be'. In this tremendous pressure policy. from within is the secret of a growth that is irresistible, because it is part of the very creature that is growing.

This growth may be at times frustrated. but the more frustrated it becomes the more determined it becomes; and actually, this growth is most rapid in periods of' greatest adversity, and least rapid In those brief interludes of' prosperity and security which apparently do come at times to a troubled human kind.

Therefore, in estimating the forces at work in human society, we must not fail to recognize the importance of the constructive agencies which have something destructive agencies can never have, and that is the support of Universal Law itself. That which ultimately wins is that which works with that Law and not against it. The Law for man is the growth of man and the unfoldment of his own individual potential. Anything that is opposed to that must ultimately perish., even though at any particular time it may seem to be victorious.

In the inevitables of human life, we need have small concern., for they will fulfill, and it is far better for us to engage in cooperation with these inevitables, even on a small scale, than it is for us to waste our time and energy in morbid reflections about the strength of our adversaries. "It is better to fail in a cause that must ultimately win, than to win in a cause that will ultimately fail."

The individual who stands strong with the progress of his world is working with a cause that will win, regardless of the time element and the delays humanly created by those desiring special advantages and privileges.

There is absolutely no use in this world of being afraid of anything. There is no use in worrying about the things that are going to happen, because everything that happens is helping someone make a decision, and whatever conditions arise cannot affect the essential program of nature. Man can never destroy the Plan by which he exists. He may for a time apparently delay it; he may at times oppose it, but he is powerless to destroy the source of himself. That source is far too remote for him to be able to reach it.

Therefore, what we call calamity is mostly nature telling us what is necessary, and just as pains in the body, if neglected, can bring on serious illness, so social pains, pains of policy and economics, if neglected, may destroy that organism; but though it may destroy the organism it cannot destroy the life from which that organism descends, and that life will build and grow forever.

The most we can destroy is the structure we have built in ignorance, but the essential values are untouchable. We are either standing by contributing to a structure that will perish, or we are hard at work contributing to a structure that will endure, and this depends upon ourselves. We are the units of construction, and in a democratic system, as it was inspired by the French School, and by the teachings of the Founding Fathers of this country, the importance of the individual cannot be overestimated; he is the unit, he is the thing upon which the whole structure must stand, and democracy must live or die with the democratic conduct of the people.

If we will take that very seriously to ourselves, and every moment that we have been spending fearing, wondering, hoping, doubting or in a state of panic over subversive activities, if all that time we will now devote constructively to a program of cooperation with the realities of living, that we shall make it our program to control ourselves, direct our resources, overcome the delinquent instincts of our own natures, create peace and harmony and security in our own environment, and strongly and simply refuse to cooperate with that which is corrupt, we shall become something that is a great cause of worry to corrupt politicians, and a great source of inspiration to leaders who must come forth if there is any chance of their being supported.

The individual begins the salvation of his world by controlling his own temper, overcoming his own prejudices, recovering from his own jealousies, and by putting his values on a solid foundation and keeping them there. He is then actually a center of progress. The result can be noticed and will be noticed, and we can begin by taking our own homes and making democracies out of them.

The great Greek philosophy was that the first democracy was the home. And if the individual cannot maintain a happy, harmonious, constructive and idealistic home, he has nothing to contribute to world progress. If he has a business it is the same problem. Unless he conducts

that business on democratic principles and ideals of fairness and equity, he has nothing to preach to other people; and if he is doing these things himself, he probably has very little time to preach to anybody, but he is building and can have the satisfaction of knowing that regardless of what happens he is part of something that must ultimately win.

So let us in that type of thinking be true to the principles on which our nation was founded, get over fears and worries and get to work, always supporting with our best intelligence everything that seems to us right. If we are wrong, it is not so terribly important. It is that we are sincere, honest, and true to principles, and if a democratic nation responds to this quality from within themselves – the nation being the people – there is no possibility that a government can pass unaffected by this.

So that type of thinking is what we owe to the Founding Fathers and the great plan which was behind them, and I think if we live it, we will find it improves our health, makes us more companionable and useful, and that it gives us that internal sense of values with which we can face all change with a good hope... and when emergencies arise, instead of wondering what is happening, we are out trying to do what we can for those whose vision is not as great as our own. It is that we should become constructive, creative people, instead of confirmed worriers on the level of religion or politics.

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