

Gromada Response - Thoughts Regarding the Articles About Political Discord in Recent Year:

Each generation, in fact, each individual, is faced with the challenge of learning anew about life and reality. And, perhaps the most significant aspect of the learning entails how we function as social, relational being. While there are major aspects of this facet of learning that grow out of imitative observations and external forms of discipline, the fruition of such leaning relies on personal observation and reflection. Stated briefly, searching for the answer to the questions: “who am I and/or what kind of person do I want to be?”; “who am I in my relationships, -- personal and social?”; and “how might I get to know and influence others as I negotiate the social relationships in which I function?”.

While my understanding of reality and truth is an important variable in this endeavor, it is important that I recognize the limitations and the finite nature of my personal knowledge. Thus, the most important aspect when sharing my knowledge, my personal experience, and my understanding regarding any issue is not “who is right or who is wrong” but rather “can we learn from each other in a process of shared collaboration”. A major requirement for this to take place is having an open mind, -- open to differing perspectives that reflect the different and perhaps unique experiences of others.

This process of social, relational learning, as described above, is reliant on a communication process that is reciprocal; that is, it must be a “two-way” street. My own reflection on the story of the “Tower of Babel” was not in the multiple languages aspects; rather, from my life’s experience, such interference more likely grew out of presumptions about the views of others; that is, assumptions were made about what others were thinking and about the reasons for their actions; and, these were not “checked out”. Assumptions were made in ways that we would in today’s “lingo” be characterized as “confirmation bias”; i.e., fitting the preconceived notions held by the participants.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of social divisions that were described in the article we read in preparation for this discussion is the role played by “denial of reality”. This is the most primitive of human defense mechanisms. It is especially difficult to deal with because it functions at a “preconscious” level; that is, it is not fundamentally reflective of rational thinking. Thus, rational dialogue and discourse does not fit in. The facts and tests of scientific methodology and documentation are not even considered. It is determined in a primary way by how you feel. And, how we feel, it difficult to manage. This is especially true of negative feeling (e.g., anger, fear, etc.). These can effectively serve to alienate individuals and social groups. Because such feelings are destructive of trust in relationships, people are reluctant to do the work that is necessary to find ways to collaborate. They “self-limit” themselves to the closed-minded understanding that they might have and eliminate any openness to new thoughts and information.

Supplement to Response

Ben Franklin on the Constitution

“In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this constitution with all its faults because I think a general government necessary for us, and there is no form of government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered”. He reminded once more that the strength of any government rested on the virtue of the people. “This is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in

despotism , as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic government, being incapable of any other.”

Franklin doubted whether any convention could have done better. “When you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected?” The wonder was how well the present assembly had done. “I think it will astonish our enemies, who are waiting with confidence to hear that our councils are confounded like those of the builders of Babel, and that our states are on the point of separation, only to meet hereafter for the purpose of cutting one another’s throats. Thus I consent, sir, to this constitution, because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best.”

Franklin closed by suggesting that the confidentiality that had surrounded the proceedings ought to continue upon the members’ parting . “The opinions I have had of its errors, I sacrifice to the public good. I have never whispered a syllable of them abroad. Within these walls they were born, and here they shall die.” If each delegate, returning to his constituents, complained at this point or that of the new government, the total of the complaints would probably scuttle the project. On the other hand, unanimity would encourage ratification. “I hope therefore that for our own sakes as part of the people, and for the sake of posterity, we shall act heartily and unanimously.”

Submitted by Hank Gromada