

American Values and Ideals in Overseas Programs

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Acceptance or rejection by other peoples of our most cherished values and ideals depends largely upon the quality of our person-to-person contacts. Gertrude Feely has spent fifteen years in the Orient as a Methodist missionary. She is at present in Kobe, Japan.

IT is a truism to state that values and ideals are merely philosophical concepts with no breath of life in them unless we put them into practice in our daily contacts with other people. In order to evaluate American values and ideals in overseas programs, then, we must try first to establish empathy with the people of these various lands and see what they expect from America. Only so can we evaluate what is being accomplished in these respects by groups, agencies and individuals.

This article is written from the viewpoint of one familiar with Oriental countries and peoples. Residence in Japan and the Philippines and vacations and visits in other areas have brought the author contacts that have been both enriching and enlightening.

Japanese, especially, have admired the strength, the international influence, the productive ability, the individual genius of America and Americans. They have seen the results and have tried to find the secret of our way of living. But the Japanese have often confused issues, values and surface appearances. Their judgments have been based largely upon government pronouncements, newspaper and radio reports, and upon contacts with individuals

living in their land—missionaries, businessmen, teachers out on contract, and self-elected roving ambassadors who frequently are the flotsam and jetsam that every country sends into the port cities of the world. Today, army men and their families are additional witnesses to the American way of life. Traveling specialists frequently come through also. These travelers only serve to confuse the issues when they fall poetically in love with some of the picturesque or abstruse ways of the people. Scholars especially fail to make clear the distinction between their appreciation of culture, learning and art, and the problems that are involved in trying today to return to a past that does not fit into the present world picture.

America as a nation stands, in the minds of many, on a pinnacle at the present time. Much with regard to retaining this position of eminence depends upon developments during the coming months. America claims to be democratic, to be concerned over the welfare of the peoples in all parts of the world. She claims to speak on behalf of the welfare of all men. She is considered a Christian nation. The fact that many of her claims are invalidated

and rendered mere talk by her actions in America is world knowledge. If, internationally, her advances and retreats, her support or withdrawal of support is predicated on what is, from a world point of view, her own convenience and comfort, her own safety, then her ideals may rightly cease to command respect. America, in this age, is truly like a city set upon a hill and must continue to face the implications of that position.

INDIVIDUALS INFLUENCE ORIENTAL ATTITUDES

This is the general background. But what of the influence of those who live in Japan or pass through, those who have programs under way? They are the ones who give the lie to or strengthen the Oriental conceptions of America. The human element is the most influential factor of all.

The missionary program as a whole has been one that has truly conserved the best in American values and ideals. Though some individuals have been arrogant or unsympathetic, most have tried to share the best in American thought and life, religious and otherwise, while respecting the past of the people with whom they have worked. There has been a fellowship that has made it possible to show what working together can do; there has been a definite attempt to respect personality and individual ability, to oppose regimentation. Many Orientals who have gone through mission schools and have known only missionary Americans have later had a rude awakening to reality when they have entered schools in the United States.

The impact of businessmen and trav-

elers has been largely confined to the cities but rumors travel far. The business attitude of "make the most of the situation and let the people take care of themselves" has been too frequently the standard. The contributions to church, to community funds, and to other good causes do not gloss over the necessity for the expression of concern, of true sympathy and consideration in daily life, an expression that will include treatment of employees in office and home, treatment of salesmen and public servants, and respect for the laws. Arrogance, self-sufficiency, and a notable lack of or desire to appreciate the culture of the people among whom they work and live create negative feelings among these people.

Individuals and organizations have brought many benefits to Japan and to other Oriental lands. Schools, hospitals, churches and settlements have been established and maintained, aid has been given liberally. The crucial question is whether we have conducted programs in such manner as to conserve the highest values and ideals. Have the programs been carried on in a spirit of condescension or in the spirit of human brotherhood? Have we regarded the people as brown and yellow and black or as human beings with the normal hopes and longings of any American, high or low, wealthy or poor?

OCCUPATION: A CHALLENGE AND A RESPONSIBILITY

The picture in Japan under the occupation challenges us. America has had a situation ready-made for the exemplification of what her way of life really means. There are limitations, of course. Occupation involves the pres-

ence of an army whose whole organization is hierarchical, more nearly dictatorial than democratic. What does the occupation "spell out" for the Orient in its day by day activities? What does it mean for the country being occupied? The influence of the occupation just now is a mighty force which is more important in many ways than all other programs.

There are many things on the positive side of the ledger. There is a sincere desire to help Japan become democratic, to advance the standard of living, to appreciate the national culture, to establish a basis of lasting friendship between the two countries. Time and effort are given by CIE workers, army wives, chaplains, army officers and others in an effort to share and to help.

Liberal offerings to orphanages, work camps, and for rehabilitation attest the generous, sympathetic nature of the average American. Acts of heroism make a deep impression on and receive heartfelt appreciation from the Japanese. Woman's place had been improved, individual rights and responsibilities have been stressed in Japan. Discussion groups have been sponsored. An all-out educational campaign has been carried on to bring into Japanese life and thought concepts and ideals that will fit these people for truly democratic self-government.

Impatience With Traditional Ways

There is, however, a negative side to the picture. First of all, and perhaps most dangerous, there is a spirit that takes for granted that only American ideas, standards and ways are valuable and good, that we must force all peoples to accept them. It is exemplified

in schools, in the attitude toward home life and customs, in impatience with all the old ways. At its worst, it is a spirit of condescension which takes for granted that others long to be just like us and we will graciously help them to be so. Degrees of this spirit can be found almost anywhere in any of the Oriental lands. Missionaries, as well as others, often dream of a "little America" in the schoolroom, faculty meeting, church groups, and in social contacts. As Americans we too often fail to distinguish between the basic values and ideals involved and the expression thereof. Keeping in mind the basic concept of Christianity and democracy that men, as children of God, have intrinsic worth and possibilities we can still appreciate the fact that there are diversities of expression for this basic concept.

Much of what we do seems to proclaim, "Do as I say but not as I do." We stress the value of the democratic approach, democratic solutions, democratic home life and teaching methods. But the directives in regard to the activation of these principles ordinarily come down through definite channels from above rather than growing out of the local situation or resulting from local action. Admittedly, Japanese are not trained for full participation in democratic procedures. Our present methods often leave them in utter confusion. They get directives, the meanings of which lie outside their experience. To the Japanese, we may seem to be operating on the basis of some such argument as the following: "We shall proceed for the present to use certain totalitarian methods but, at a certain point in our mutual experience, we expect to be democratic." This situ-

ation is a paradox which seems to have no immediate solution. How can people work democratically if they have never had democratic experience? But how can they have this experience unless they have a chance to practice? If the best minds of a nation were put to work on the matter of ways and means, we might find a better answer than that apparently given at present.

Many Contradictions Are Evident

Examples of contradictions in words and deeds are numerous. Racial discrimination is evident. Disdain for or lack of interest in Japanese ways is implicit in the treatment sometimes given the houses preempted for the occupation personnel. Many insist on maintaining, as nearly as possible, their normal American standard of living—food, heat, housing—in a land where the median level of living is lower than the lowest in the United States. In the realm of law enforcement it has been noted that the road laws are seemingly applied with undue severity on Japanese drivers. Perhaps there is justifiable confusion in the minds of Japanese drivers when the speed limit signs vary every two or three blocks.

Japanese are confused by the power involved in many situations. Court procedures are often unintelligible to the ones involved. Individuals follow what someone advises them to do and then are left with smoldering questions and hurts when justice apparently uses the many quirks of the law to entangle them. Sometimes there is fear and anxiety when a representative of the Occupation comes to visit, anxiety over the proper respect to be shown the individual and an inability to understand

the brusque directness and frankness of some visitors.

Certain incidents involve soldiers who go to civilian practitioners for treatment and then refuse to pay them unless they are willing to accept army scrip. It is illegal for civilians, foreign or national, to possess scrip.

Unless we know the people of a country and listen to the small murmurs of everyday life, we fail to realize that the eyes of the people are wise eyes, seeing not only what we would like for them to see but seeing also the undercurrents that so often direct our actions even though we ourselves loyally protest faith in ideals that are at variance with these same actions.

Practical Programs are Needed

Americans around the world, in all positions, need more of the attitude that we bring what we have found of worth and value to pool with your values so that together we may construct a finer society. "We are builders together with God." In this way the values and ideals we cherish will take on real meaning and exert their just influence in the world. We want a good world, not just an American world. We can work for such a world by making our daily living such as to exemplify the ideals we hold. We must build for sympathy and understanding.

The American program overseas needs more men and women in every field—religious, educational, business—who are willing to give the time and effort that building a constructive, practical program requires. Practical programs for daily living, based on Christian principles of respect for people

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