

## THE BOOKCASE EFFECT

*by Robert Fitt*

I had a dream last night, one of those rare dreams that I remembered clearly at daybreak. It was a different kind of dream because it began with contention and ended in peace. In the dreams of the night I found myself knocking on the door of a man who had expressed feelings of irritation with our community. Ever since he had moved into the area he felt awkward and misunderstood. Feelings had escalated and harsh words had been exchanged with his neighbors. As I approached his door I remembered the Lord's counsel to avoid contention and conflict; and with a prayerful, humble, heart I begged for his forgiveness in behalf of the community, and pled for understanding and friendship despite our obvious differences.

He met my overtures with a smile; and it was only after he invited me to share breakfast with him that I realized how generous he was, and how much he wanted to be a part of us. But because of our differences he felt awkward and unsure, as did his neighbors, and conflict had arisen. Yet, when once his door was opened, the floodgate of his feelings opened with it; and he was anxious to share his feelings with me; and I was wise enough to listen.

It was a large kitchen—mine was tiny by comparison. His was a home with many rooms, compared to my few; and his large farm had been blessed with bounteous crops, as compared to my small lot in the city. He introduced me to his large family compared to my few children, and to some of his beliefs. There were many differences.

His children were avid readers, and he showed me that each of his children had been provided with a separate bookcase, each one showing how different each child was from others. While their bookcases looked much alike from a distance, a closer examination showed striking differences. Authors like Chaucer and Shakespeare were prominent in one, Louie LaMour occupied much of the space in another, while Walt Disney and his successors were prominent in yet another. Each child was different, but my host warmly urged me to glory in their differences, telling me how much spice and flavor their unique personalities added to their family relationships.

As I studied the titles in each bookcase, I was enthralled; for I realized that I was witnessing a microcosm of the vast differences, in interest and culture between the peoples of the world; each one different—yet each much the same; their language and culture, their dance, their music and their art and are hauntingly beautiful despite their differences. And yet their needs and feelings are very much the same as mine.

I thought, then, that bridging cultural gaps is much like coming to a neighbor's door and offering love in the place of conflict; if we do this, it is comforting to realize that each of us is an odd-ball in his own way. No one sees the world precisely as we do. People are as different as snowflakes and yet as much alike; and if we, like snow, can but lie peacefully together we can blanket the sordid ugliness of the world with love, and bring softness and unity where harshness and dissention once thrived.

Turning from the bookcase I was led to ask "What about our differences?" He explained that we need not give up our precious beliefs to love others for what they are.

“And what of our enemies?” “Love them”, he said, “just as Christ loves them;” and they will be enemies no more.

In my dream I came to teach—I was taught instead.

What did I learn? I learned to Listen, and learn, and to love as Jesus loves.