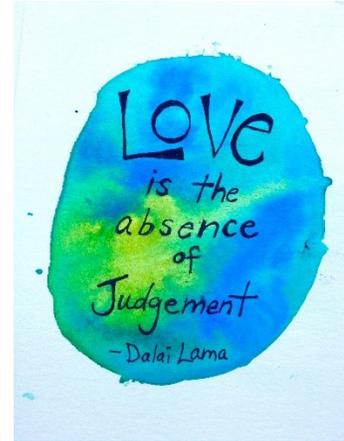


How quick are we to judge?

We all know social media has its pros and cons. As an historian, social media provides a useful insight into where people are and how they interpret 'things' (the past, situations, the present even). One way of doing this is seeing what stands out. And there have been few, Christianity, Islam, book lists all falling foul of expectations. It's not just social media, a friend who lost his wife last year was not 'allowed' to celebrate Christmas in the small community he resides in because it would be disrespectful – the fact that she was now released from her years of being bedridden and in pain having no impact at all.



Who decides what society expects? How do we make a stand against the onslaught of 'not meeting expectations'? A recent example: history colleagues in the USA were tweeting about there being no person of colour on the 'best book list for 2018' – not having looked at the list, my immediate questions were: perhaps no one of obvious colour, but how many are ethnic minorities? How many of the titles are on or about people of colour or ethnic minorities? Do we need to include texts even if they are not the best? Who determines what is 'best'? These are not questions to reply with, unless one is looking to be 'attacked' for challenging views. A couple of days later, someone in the community recognised that one name belonged to an African-American. Even more questions, how can you tell from a name? In the past, it was possible, and today you can still make an educated guess, but as people are crossing borders and getting to know individuals from other cultures, it's becoming more of a challenge. No mention of gender in the correspondence suggests the expectations around this criteria have been met, broadly speaking. And what of the age spectrum, the newcomers to the field, the niche topic?

I was recently told the story of a father who gave a homeless person £50. His son turned to the father and said, 'why did you do that? You know he's only going to spend it on drugs and alcohol.' The father replied, 'that then shows his character. My actions, show mine.' Statements about unmet expectations say as much about the person making them as about the individual reacting to them.

Listening to an Imam a little while ago, I was jolted at his take on colonisation and a comment that Christians bribed people in Africa to become Christians. If they didn't convert to Christianity, they wouldn't get food. Hadn't I heard the same thing being said in the other direction as a student? Why hadn't I questioned that statement in the way I was now mentally questioning the Imam's? Not long after I was at a talk where a Christian was telling of her work with refugees and how many had turned to Christ because of the generosity they'd been shown – no apparent strings attached. A new form of colonisation? Ulterior motives? A little searching and I am sure I'll find reciprocal stories.

And what of judgements I agree with? Surely I should question those as thoroughly as I do those which jolt? So, what does it mean to be a Christian? This is [one take](#) which went [viral](#) in adapted form (Maya Angelou) in 2014.

AS, 31 December 2018

(image courtesy of <http://mindfulartcenter.com/art/love-is-the-absence-of-judgement>)