

## **Resolution on Religious, Religion-Based and/or Religion-Derived Prejudice**

Adopted by APA Council of Representatives, August, 16 2007

### **Introduction**

Prejudice based on or derived from religion and antireligious prejudice has been, and continues to be, a cause of significant suffering in the human condition. The American Psychological Association's policy statement on prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination provides operational definitions for prejudices, stereotypes, and interpersonal and institutional discrimination. The resolution specifically states,

Prejudices are unfavorable affective reactions to or evaluations of groups and their members, stereotypes are generalized beliefs about groups and their members, interpersonal discrimination is differential treatment by individuals toward some groups and their members relative to other groups and their members, and institutional discrimination involves policies and contexts that create, enact, reify, and maintain inequality. (American Psychological Association Council of Representatives, 2006)

Prejudice directed against individuals and groups based on their religious or spiritual beliefs, practice, adherence, identification, or affiliation has resulted in a wide range of discriminatory practices. Such discrimination has been carried out by individuals, by groups, and by governments. Examples of nongovernmental discrimination based on religion include social ostracism against individuals based on their religion, desecration of religious buildings or sites, and violence or other hate crimes targeted toward adherents of particular faith traditions (U.S. Department of State, 2004). Prejudice and discrimination based on religion and/or spirituality continue to be problematic even in countries that otherwise have achieved a high level of religious liberty and pluralism. Governmental discrimination based on religion has taken both covert and overt forms. Current examples of covert religious discrimination include government surveillance of religious speech, pejorative labeling by governmental bodies of certain religious groups as "cults" with a resulting loss of religious freedoms, and a lack of legal protection for citizens from nonmajority faiths who are victims of religious hate crimes (Center for Religious Freedom, 2001, 2003; U.S. Department of State, 2004). Prejudice based on or derived from religion has been used to justify discrimination, prejudice, and human rights violations against those holding different religious beliefs, those who profess no religious beliefs, individuals of various ethnicities, women, those who are not exclusively heterosexual, and other individuals and groups depending on perceived theological justification or imperative.

Indeed, it is a paradoxical feature of these kinds of prejudices that religion can be both target and victim of prejudice, as well as construed as justification and imperative for prejudice. The right of persons to practice their religion or faith does not and cannot entail a right to harm others or to undermine the public good. This situation is further complicated by the increasing tendency of individuals to identify as "spiritual" apart from any identification or affiliation with a religious tradition (Hill & Pargament, 2003). It is as yet unclear what impact on the relationships between spirituality and prejudice this increasing trend toward noninstitutionalized spirituality may produce.

While many individuals and groups have been victims of antireligious discrimination, religion itself has also been the source of a wide range of beliefs about and attitudes and behaviors toward other individuals (Donahue & Nielsen, 2005). Several decades of psychological research have found complicated relationships between measures of religiousness and measures of prejudice (Allport, 1954/1979; Allport & Ross, 1967; Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). Dozens of studies have reported positive linear relationships between measures of conventional religiousness, such as frequency of church attendance or fundamentalism scale elevations, and measures of negative social attitudes, such as prejudice, dogmatism, or authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, 2005). Yet, Allport (1950) and his colleagues (Allport & Ross, 1967) observed that the relationship between religion and prejudice is curvilinear rather than linear, with highly religious individuals having lower levels of prejudice than marginally religious adherents. This finding has been relatively robust over numerous subsequent studies on religion and prejudice using self-

report measures (Batson & Stocks, 2005; Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974). Recent research, using non-self-report measures, has found even more complex and varied sets of relationships between diverse types of personal religiousness and prejudice indicators (Batson & Stocks, 2005). As Allport (1954/1979) concluded, "The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice" (p. 444). While religious motivations and rationales for violent conflicts, social oppression of religious outgroups or norm violators, and the reinforcement of prejudicial stereotypes are readily adducible, it is also true that religious motivations and rationales have been key factors contributing to prosocial developments such as the abolition of slavery (Harvey, 2000; Herek, 1987; Hunsberger, 1996; Rambo, 1993; Rodriguez & Ouellete, 2000; Silberman, 2005; Stark, 2003). This complex relationship between religion and psychosocial variables has led to multiple models of the relationship between forms of religiousness and psychological adjustment (Allport, 1950; Altemeyer, 2003; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Watson et al., 2003). A common motif across these models is that it is the way one is religious rather than merely whether one is religious that is determinative of psychosocial outcomes (Donahue, 1985).

It is important for psychology as a behavioral science, and various faith traditions as theological systems, to acknowledge and respect their profoundly different methodological, epistemological, historical, theoretical, and philosophical bases. Psychology has no legitimate function in arbitrating matters of faith and theology, and faith traditions have no legitimate place arbitrating behavioral or other sciences. While both traditions may arrive at public policy perspectives operating out of their own traditions, the bases for these perspectives are substantially different.

WHEREAS religion is an important influence in the lives of the vast majority of people, is ubiquitous in human cultures, and is becoming increasingly diverse throughout the world (Brown, 2005; Eck, 2001; Genia, 2000; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Shafranske, 1996); and

WHEREAS the American Psychological Association opposes prejudice and discrimination based upon age, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or physical condition (American Psychological Association, 2002); and

WHEREAS, psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people and are committed to improving the condition of individuals, organizations, and society; and psychologists are aware of and respect cultural, individual, and role differences among individuals, including (but not limited to) those based on ethnicity, national origin, and religion (American Psychological Association, 2002); and

WHEREAS the American Psychological Association has recognized the profound negative psychological consequences of hate crimes motivated by prejudice (American Psychological Association Council of Representatives, 2005), and

WHEREAS prejudice against individuals and groups based on their religion or spirituality, and prejudice based on or derived from religion, continues to result in various forms of harmful discrimination perpetuated by private individuals, social groups, and governments in both covert and overt forms (Balakian, 2004; Center for Religious Freedom, 2001, 2003; Marshall, 2000; U.S. Department of State, 2004; Yakovlev, 2004); and

WHEREAS the experience of pluralistic cultures that embrace religious liberty shows that a variety of religious faiths and nonreligious worldviews can peacefully coexist while maintaining substantial doctrinal, valuative, behavioral, and organizational differences (Byrd, 2002; Eck, 2001; Marshall, 2000); and

WHEREAS understanding and respecting patient/client spirituality and religiosity are important in conducting culturally sensitive research, psychological assessment, and treatment (Hathaway, Scott, & Garver, 2004; McCullough, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Shafranske, 1996; Worthington & Sandage, 2001); and

WHEREAS evidence exists that religious and spiritual factors are underexamined in psychological research both in terms of their prevalence within various research populations and in terms of their

possible relevance as influential variables (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Hill & Pargament, 2003; King & Boyatzis, 2004; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Weaver et al., 1998); and

WHEREAS contemporary psychology as well as religious and spiritual traditions all address the human condition, they often do so from distinct presuppositions, approaches to knowledge, and social roles and contexts, and while these differences can be enriching and may stimulate fruitful interaction between these domains, they also can present opportunities for misunderstanding and tension around areas of shared concern (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Gould, 2002; Haldeman, 2004; Miller & Delaney, 2004; Van Leeuwen, 1982); and

WHEREAS religion and spirituality can promote beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors that can dramatically impact human life in ways that are either enhancing or diminishing of the well-being of individuals or groups (Allport, 1950; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, 2005; Silberman, 2005; Stark, 2003);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association condemns prejudice and discrimination against individuals or groups based on their religious or spiritual beliefs, practices, adherence, or background.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association condemns prejudice directed against individuals or groups, derived from or based on religious or spiritual beliefs.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association takes a leadership role in opposing discrimination based on or derived from religion or spirituality and encouraging commensurate consideration of religion and spirituality as diversity variables.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association encourages all psychologists to act to eliminate discrimination based on or derived from religion and spirituality.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association encourages actions that promote religious and spiritual tolerance, liberty, and respect, in all arenas in which psychologists work and practice, and in society at large.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association views no religious, faith, or spiritual tradition, or lack of tradition, as more deserving of protection than another and that the American Psychological Association gives no preference to any particular religious or spiritual conventions.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association will include information on prejudice and discrimination based on religion and spirituality in its multicultural and diversity training material and activities.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association encourages the dissemination of relevant empirical findings about the psychological correlates of religious/spiritual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to concerned stakeholders with full sensitivity to the profound differences between psychology and religion/spirituality.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association encourages individuals and groups to work against any potential adverse psychological consequences to themselves, others, or society that might arise from religious or spiritual attitudes, practices, or policies.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that psychologists are encouraged to be mindful of their distinct disciplinary and professional roles when approaching issues of shared concern with religious adherents.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that psychologists are encouraged to recognize that it is outside the role and expertise of psychologists as psychologists to adjudicate religious or spiritual tenets,

while also recognizing that psychologists can appropriately speak to the psychological implications of religious/spiritual beliefs or practices when relevant psychological findings about those implications exist. Those operating out of religious/spiritual traditions are encouraged to recognize that it is outside their role and expertise to adjudicate empirical scientific issues in psychology, while also recognizing that they can appropriately speak to theological implications of psychological science.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that psychologists are careful to prevent bias from their own spiritual, religious, or nonreligious beliefs from taking precedence over professional practice and standards or scientific findings in their work as psychologists.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association encourages collaborative activities in pursuit of shared prosocial goals between psychologists and religious communities when such collaboration can be done in a mutually respectful manner that is consistent with psychologists' professional and scientific roles.

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