

# **Detachment and Christian Maturity**

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Paul G. Hiebert

We all live and die in our tents, the little worlds we erect. Inside it is familiar, safe and secure. Outside the world is strange, unknown and dangerous. We are inside. Outside there are other creatures in other tents and other camps, but they are not human as we know ourselves to be. We need them, but how do we view and relate to them? We have several options.

### Egocentrism

It is comfortable and natural to live our lives alone in our tents, to focus on ourselves and our needs and desires. It is safe, and we do not have to deal with the fact that there are others with their needs and desires which are different from our own. We judge others by our definitions of truth and our likes and dislikes. We offer them love when they make us happy. But we never open ourselves to the vulnerability of being hurt or dealing with differences.

The fall reinforced this self-centeredness. Satan did not tempt Adam and Eve to worship him. That would make no sense. Rather he appealed to their self-centeredness and invited them to worship themselves. In the end, sin is self-deification. Paul writes that in the end times people will be lovers of Self (2 Tim. ). The consequences of this he spells out in his long list of words: jealous,

Many people live all their lives in the little homes of self. They are hard to live with. They are the center of their world, and must be the center of attention, and have their own way. Everything is measured by how it affects them. They impose their judgments on others, and do not question their own beliefs. It is the duty of others to make them happy and care for them, not for them to make others happy. They expect others to guess what is in their minds. They are

jealous when others receive attention and praise. They are critical of everything different from them. They are complainers for they expect things to work out as they want, and can't handle things when these don't. They are controllers, seeking to keep charge of things, afraid to let go. Like fearful children, they see problems, not solutions. They constantly need care, and care only for those who make them happy. They fear the new and so end up staying in the security of their little world. They see things as black and white--based on what they think and like. Anything that differs from them is sneered at and condemned. They have strongly developed Fearful Childs [frightened and insecure] and strong controlling Parents. They have weak Adults

A world of egocentric people is full of conflicts, jealousies, competition and hatred. With the shift from the priority of group to the priority of the individual, and with the shift from the concept of soul to self, this is increasingly the world in which we live. Capitalism, consumerism, self-realization, self-fulfillment.

- self-love. Peterson Devotions February 15. It seeks to add only to itself, so boring.

## 2. Familiocentrism

We cannot get out of our tents, but we can begin to invite others into our tents. As Eugene Peterson points out, the only way out of our selves is to move the self into a larger house (19##, Feb. 15).

- from me to us family. I to we.

When we become Christians theologically our center is Christ, but in practice we live within the confines of our little worlds. How do we get out of this? What marks spiritual maturity?

3. Ethnocentrism: [class, ethnicity, nationality, tribalism, etc.]

- must bring these into our house.
- at first they come as strangers so we treat them gingerly as guests. Can't argue and relationships are fragile. So we must pass time and live together before we can build trust and ways to deal with conflicts that arise, and deal with our inner distastes.
- gradually the other becomes 'us' and we are comfortable to care enough to confront and work things out.
- encounter with others should lead us to begin to see things from their point of view, and then to a metapersonal point of view with both of us in the picture. This develops the sense of 'us', and self-love.
- the move is from participant to participant-as-observer, to observer as participant, to participant. This is Peterson's comment on detachment.
- those who learn to see and identify with others learn love. Love is not a feeling but a commitment to be for the other. It displaces self as the center and puts first 'the other' and then 'us' in its place. They become care givers. Empower others

Meta personal grids:

- humans unique in their ability to be both participants and observers at the same time
- this ability gives self awareness, self-critique, self-realization
- grow up as participants

- as we go beyond egocentrism we gain the ability to be observers, and see our role in the larger social context
- moving into a new culture forces us to develop our observer role. We are outsiders and placed on the margins.
- major positions in any social setting
  - = participant
  - = observer
  - = participant as observer
  - = observer as participant
- has to do with self awareness, vantage point of perspective, and nature of relationship

- monocultural: with people who share worldview, shared information, implied. Positivism

### 2.1. Ethnocentrism in the church:

### 2.2 Ethnocentrism in missions:

- danger of ethnocentrism: us vs them

### 3. Androcentrism: Group to Humanity:

3.1 Colonial era: judge other by our culture. Not aware of our wv and biases.

- teach right biblical interpretations

3.2 Cultural Pluralism era: judge others by their own, recognize wv differences, little shared information. Read bible for self

- encounter with other cultures leads us to deal seriously with 'others' and 'otherness'. This can lead us to developing a metacultural grid in which first we see things from the view points of others, then from a metacultural grid in which they and we are one humanity.
- encounter with pluralism first leads to relativism, then to a new transcending frame of reference which includes diversity in the midst of underlying unity.

3.3 Development of metacultural grids: metatheology, epistemological shift,

Theology not equated with Bible.

- metacultural grids
- hermeneutics of suspicion

3.4 Revelation comes to all cultures so all are relative to one another and under the absolute judgment of God and revelation.

- racism, classism

### 3.1 Androcentrism in the church

we do God's work for him. Participants and Participant observers?

### 3.2 Androcentrism in missions

## 4. Theocentrism:

- as we mature and approach death, we begin to realize that this world, too, is too narrow a perspective. We begin to detach ourselves from the attachments to this world, and to see things from a bigger perspective.
- again, we move through the participant--part./observ--to observer stage and get ready for heaven.
- metahuman grids.

## **Theological Perspectives**

### 1. We are participants in salvation history:

- we see the world through our own eyes
- we are in charge
- we act to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth
- mechanistic model and quantification for this puts us in control
- we are in control through management, planning, strategizing and action
- in church, we run committees, plan programs and do jobs

2. We are observers of salvation history:

- God is doing his work in history
- we sit by and watch him do his work
- we need not participate in his activities

3. We are participant-observers in salvation history:

- we and God do the work. We must act and God adds his blessings. Joab [Peterson]
- plan and pray for God's assistance
- measure results of our actions by quantitative measures

4. We are observer-participants in salvation history:

- we follow God as he works out salvation history
- we seek to see where God is working and listen for his call in our lives
- we follow God's lead, and see his serendipities
- spirituality is in everyday life, not as a retreat

### **Participant Observer in Missions**

1. Participant:

- usually we come into a culture and see ourselves as the center of the work.
- we plan the work, we provide the resources, we do the job, we evaluate the outcome
- planning, strategy and activism are the measures of our faithfulness



- powerful, activist

## 2. Participant as Observer:

- living in a culture forces us to take it seriously, and see the 'other' as fully human
- we learn the language and identify on the surface, but the normative culture is still our own [theology, church polity, economic resources]
- partnership in which we keep control
- accounting mentality

## 3. Observer:

- a second approach is to begin as an observer
- the context in which we work is the focus and ground for orientation.
- we come as learners and seek to understand the culture as it is.
- learn the language, emic analysis, student, powerless
- see others as truly human but still 'other'
- end up here as an anthropologist, most go further

## 4. Observer as Participant:

- move to becoming observer-->participants.
- context remains the field, not our agenda
- see where God is at work, and join in
- partnership is to empower the other and to join in true oneness with them
- learn to see that there is no 'other', only 'us'.

## Conclusions

WE	WE + GOD	GOD + US	GOD
control		obeyt	
plan		listen, see	

P-->E

E-->P

E<-->>P

P<-->>E

## Theological Reflections

1. We start with seeing ourselves as the center of the world.

- we naturally want to do things for God who has done so much for us--praise him, worship

him, serve him. Build him a house. Peterson

David and Nathan.

- We enter schol/church to learn God. We find God and change our ways: repent, believe and

follow. Take on responsibilities in new world of worship and work. Advanced in the

ranks, and soon we're telling others what to do and how to do it. All this is good and

right. And then we cross a line--we get bossy and cranky on behalf of God. We begin by

finding in God a way to live rightly and well, and then along the way we take over God's

work for him and take charge of making sure others live rightly and well. We get the idea that we're important, self-important, because we're around the Important (Peterson 1997, 150-151).

2. We mature to see God is building a house for us, and shaping us into his bride.

- we need to continue ask and submit. Ask god for help, for refuge, for healing, for salvation, for deliverance, for forgiveness, for mercy, for the Holy Spirit.

We are afraid of getting caught doing too little for God.

- not 'doing nothing'-- pious sloth. Constantly engaged--participants.

- not stoic resignation: will of God. Prayer is acquiescence to the inevitable: we must remain active and pray and ask for help.

- "But there are times when our grand human plans to do something for God are seen, after a night of prayer, to be a huge human distraction from what God is doing for us (Peterson 1997, 160).

- "God's word to David through Nathan was essentially this: "You want to build me a house? Forget it--I'm going to build *you* a house. The kingdom that I'm shaping here isn't what you do for me but what I do through you. I'm doing the building here, not you. I'm not going to let you confuse things by launching a building operation of your own. . . ; If there's any building to be done, *I'm* doing it (Peterson 1997, 161)."

- Those crowned and put on thrones--physicians, lawyers, teachers, chairs of boards, etc--find people deferring to them--treated not divine but a little more than human. Must resist these deferences.

- not a passive withdrawal and detachment as observer

But an active observer as participant

- obedience, not control and planning and command
- not withdrawal from life but active involvement in it in obedience.

**Notes on identity:**

1. Anthony Giddens. 1991 Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.

Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.

Taylor, Charles 1989. Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity. Cambridge, MA:

Harvard University Press.

Baumeister, Roy F. 1986. Identity: Culture Change and the Struggle for Self. NEY: Oxford

Univ. Press

1. Giddens: meaningful identity requires a moral framework of existence--goodness, and a cognitive [ontological] framework of existence--meaningfulness. Existential isolation from such larger frameworks is not so much a separation of individual from others, as a separation from the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence. Modernity has lost its moral moorings and roots morality only in the control systems of modernity to the self. The individual self is its own source of moral guidance.

Self-identity is not something just given as a result of continuities of the individual's action-system, but has to be created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography. In modernity it is to become one's own person, almost to give birth to oneself [R. Bellah p. 83].

Taylor: there is a strong sense of connection between a sense of identity and one's notion of the good. The notion of good is part of a moral philosophy. In modernity this has focused on what it is right to do rather than on what it is right to be--defining good in terms of obligation

rather than the nature of the good life. He sees the search for a believable framework is the search for meaning. There is a difference between fear of violating the frame and the fear of having no frame--meaninglessness, which dominates our age. Absence of framework leads to the 'disengaged self.' The ideal is the disengaged self, capable of objectifying not only the surrounding world but also his own emotions and inclinations, fears and compulsions, and achieving thereby a kind of distance and self-possession which allows him to act rationally. p. 21

For identity is something that one ought to be true to, can fail to uphold, can surrender when one ought to. It provides us the frame within which things have meaning for us.

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Baumeister, Roy F. 1986. Identity: Cultural; Change and the Struggle for Self. NY: Oxford Univ. Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1989. Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity. Cambridge,MS: Harvard University Press.

Giddens: we need an ontological [cognitive] framework to give meaning to life, and a moral framework to define what is good and right and give satisfying existence. In modernity the self-mader person lacks moral meaning because the self defines morality. Self-containment or self-grounding are damnation.

Identity of the self, in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, presumes reflexive

awareness--self-consciousness. It is not simply given by environment and the result of continuities of the individual's action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in reflexive activities in the individuals. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her/his biography. Modern stress on self-reliance leaves the individual as its own source of moral guidance. It is almost to give birth to oneself [R. Bellah 81, 83] permeated with the utilitarian and Cartesian philosophy. I am my own god. Religion is man's way of creating self-identity and own salvation for own purposes.

Charles Taylor shows a strong connection between sense of self identity and one's notion of the good. In modernity this is a moral philosophy that focuses on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be.

Framworks provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgments, intuitions or reactions. They articulate our sense of orientation in the space of questions about the good.

Houston, identity is not found in the self, but in the essence of our being. eg. vine and branches. our identity is a product of our grounding. God is not self-grounded, but expresses self in the beloved. This is what the theory of Kenosis and Trinity are all about.