

International?!

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“Internationalize? Who? Me? I’m already international. I eat suchi, kimchi, tacos, curry, tahini, hamburgers, kiwi and bananas, and drink Colombian coffee and Darjeeling tea I wear cloths woven in China and tailored in Hong Kong. I use a calculator manufactured in Malaysia, assembled in Singapore and labeled in Japan. I use E-mail to contact friends in India, and surf the world-wide web. A third of my class at TEDS is students from abroad. Last year I traveled to Uzbekestan for a two week term of ministry. What more do you want?”

What do we mean by ‘International’ at T.I.U.? Obviously we mean many things--having students and faculty from around the world, a curriculum that reflects the global church, a burden for world mission and the formation of a truly international fellowship of Christians on campus. We also mean a change of ways in how we view Others and Otherness.

Past Western Views of Others

All people have views of their others, and these views shape the way they treat these others. During the Middle Ages Europeans saw foreigners as ‘monsters’ (the Old Norse *ǫviðr*, Scandinavian *bergrisar*, and Grendel of Beowulf). After the coming of Christianity, these monsters were seen as the “descendants of Cain.” Although Augustine argued that these Others are humans, belief in monstrous races continued until the sixteenth century. Christians at this time saw the Muslims invading their lands as ‘infidels’--humans who had heard and rejected God.

In the fifteenth century, European explorers discovered unknown lands and strange peoples not found on their maps. Who were these creatures? Christians saw them as humans, but ‘pagans’--people who had never heard the Gospel, but who could become Christians.

Western traders saw them as labor--as 'slaves.' To Scientists they were "barbarians" and "savages," waiting to be discovered and studied.

The definition of the Other changed with the coming of the Enlightenment. The shift is epitomized in the experiences of Robinson Crusoe, the quintessential Enlightenment man--solitary individual, Cartesian rationalist, and technological inventor. After eighteen years alone on an island he comes across the charred human bones on a beach. Cannibals! From the depth of his European soul he vomits. His initial reaction was that these others were "savages," and "evil." He is "civilized." and "good." He wants to kill all he can, but, on further reflection, decides he has no right to judge these people raised in another culture. They must be judged according to their own morality and culture. Crusoe rescues one, and names him--he is "Friday"--transforming this nameless savage into a primitive human in Crusoe's world. But if Friday is fully human, what is the difference between them? Crusoe's answer is that Friday is unenlightened, therefore naked, and primitive, while he is Enlightened, and clothed. But Friday can be civilized by education.

Enlightenment people viewed Others in three different ways. First, Others were no longer 'pagans' or 'savages,' but 'unenlightened.' Second, they were 'aboriginals'--fossil humans who had not evolved as the west had. Third, they were like our 'ancestors'--stone age people! They help us understand *our* history, and the only ones who can understand the play is, of course, "us." It was clear that western civilization is the most evolved of all cultures. In this light, the colonial venture is not oppressive, it is the benevolent endeavor of the enlightened to help the Others join them in their full humanity. But there remained in the minds of some a gnawing doubt. Is it possible that savages are Noble Savages who are happier than we? Herman Melville writes of the encounter of a French admiral and a South Sea Island king.

The admiral came forward with uncovered head and extended one hand, while the old king saluted him by a stately flourish of his weapon. The next moment they stood side by side, these two extremes of the social scale--the polished splendid Frenchman, and the poor tattooed savage. . . In the one is shown the result of long centuries of progressive refinement, which have gradually converted the mere creature into the semblance of all that is elevated and grand; while the other, after the lapse of the same period, has not advanced one step in the career of improvement. "Yet after all" quoth I to myself, "may not the savage be the happier man of the two?"

Unfortunately, the Enlightenment had a deep effect on many western Christians who saw it as their responsibility not only to share the Gospel with Others, but also to civilize them.

Today, in our post-modern world, the world has become our neighbor, and we encounter Others every day--in the airport, at stores, in school. Who are these Others? In anthropology they came to be seen as 'natives'--fully rational beings who have their own cultures. The preservation of these cultures became of supreme value. We should not judge other cultures, or convert people to Christianity. To do so is ethnocentric and imperialist. But this leaves us in a fragmented, divided, warring world, not an international human community.

A Christian Response

How should we as Christians view Others in an international world? First, we must affirm and live our common humanity with all people. The Scriptures lead us to a startling conclusion: *at the deepest level of our identity as humans, there are no others, there is only us.* On the surface we are males and females, blacks and whites, rich and poor, but beneath this we are one humanity. Our oneness of humanity is declared in the creation account (Gen. 1:26), and affirmed by the universalism implicit in the Old Testament (Ps 148:11-13, Is 45:22, Micah 4:1-2). Jesus commanded us to love our enemies--to see them as neighbors, as 'us.' (Matt. 5:43-44)."

If we at the deepest level we see some people as Others, our attempts to build bridges of reconciliation between "us" and "them" will fail. Beneath all the bridges we build, we know that there is still the chasm of Otherness which will separate us when things go bad. If we begin with the fact of our one humanity, we can celebrate our differences because they are secondary.

In affirming the oneness of humanity, we do not deny the great difficulty in understanding people in other cultures. Far too often we claim to know what others are thinking and feeling, when, in fact, we are totally wrong. The more we study cultural differences the more we realize how difficult true cross-cultural communication really is.

The Scriptures leads us to a second startling conclusion: *in the church there are no others, there are only us--members of the one body of Christ*. Peter's amazement at what was taking place can be detected in his words in the house of Cornelius, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34)!" The unity of the church is not a product of the Good News, it is an essential part of the Gospel. Paul writes, "[Christ] tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. . . Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everyone. (Eph. 2:14-15 Peterson 1993, 404).

Internationalization at T.I.U. must begin with our attitudes towards one another and the world. Here we must learn to model a truly Christian community that celebrates the oneness of Christ's body, and gain a vision of our God given ministry to a lost world.

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