

**Who is the Other?**

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We are facing a sea change in higher education. Behind us is the seas of western parochialism, ahead the ocean of global understanding.

The change is one of cognitive frameworks. Parochialism looks to itself and its local reference points. We from the west took our systems of knowledge to be universal, and gave little thought to systems of knowledge in other cultures. Globalism has a universal frame that encompasses all peoples, languages, cultures and religions. Missionaries have long faced the challenge of global diversity. Today, pastors and churches face it in the growing diversification of their neighborhoods and congregations.

Globalism is a new mind set. It seeks to develop mental frameworks that takes into account and tests all parochial systems of knowledge. An illustration of a shift from a parochial to a global frame took place in the U.S. in the 1860s. The early settlers used a system of survey called "metes-and-bounds." They marked their fields by local reference points-- the boundary of the field ran along the river until it met the stream, then up the stream to the large rock. . . . In towns they laid their roads square to local features--to the river, railroad or old horse trail. Each locality had its own reference points and its own maps. There was no universal map to make travel between distant points easy.

After 1864, the global meridian system of longitudes and latitudes was introduced. The reference points were now the North and South poles, and the equator. Using these all points on earth could be mapped on one grid, travel between them became possible. This shift from local to global frames of reference is seen in U.S. cities such as Minneapolis, Minn., and Fresno, Calif. The first city blocks were laid "square" to the river or railroad. After 1865 they were laid

north/south. The result was a great deal of confusion where the two systems meet.

We face a similar shift in higher education. We must develop global mental frames that encompass western and nonwestern systems of knowledge. This is true in western science which must be seen as one among many sciences. It is true of religions and theologies which must deal with the diversity of human beliefs.

The easy solution to pluralism is to affirm all parochialisms as equally valid. This, however, leads us only to a destructive relativism. Moreover, it gives us no answer to global problems of population explosion, ecological destruction, sin and the lostness of humanity. The more difficult task is to develop global frames that enable us to understand and evaluate different parochial systems, and arrive at an understanding of global truth.

Globalism is also an attitude. We see this in the words westerners used when they described 'others' they encountered during the age of exploration. Robinson Crusoe is a classical description of one such an encounter as seen through the eyes of people of the Enlightenment. Crusoe sees Friday as a "savage" whom he must name and instruct. "Savages" are naked and he is clothed, they are uncivilized and he is civilized.

At the end of the Enlightenment, attitudes changed. The word 'civilization' was replaced by the word 'culture,' and nonwestern 'others' were no longer seen as barbaric 'savages,' but childlike 'primitives' who could be taught. According to evolutionists, they were biologically closer to animals, and their exotic cultures and strange practices were seen as prehistoric fossils of cultural evolution. For example, Marlow, the narrator in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1890), says regarding his first encounter with "primitives" in the jungle,

It was unearthly, and the men were--No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it--this suspicion of their not being inhuman. . . . They howled and leaped . . . but what . . . but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--

the thought of your remote kinship.

Unfortunately, this attitude sometimes rubbed off on western Christians and missions.

In recent years the social sciences have been struggling to see the 'other' as fully human and equal to ourselves, only different. But this does not go far enough. Christianity provides us with the frame to be truly global in our attitudes. It shows us that in the church the 'other' is indeed 'us'. In Christ we are one new people, regardless of our ethnicity, class and gender. In the church, at the deepest level, there is no 'we' and 'they'. There is only **we** despite all our differences. It is one thing to know this in our heads. It is another thing for our attitudes to show this.

In the world, we share a common humanity with 'others' that is deeper than our differences. This is the basis of our love for the lost, and our desire to see them saved.

Finally, globalization must be a response in which our mental and attitudinal frame is manifest in the way we relate to others. It is our aim here at TEDS to help us all gain the global vision of the church and of humanity that God himself has as creator, savior and lord of all.

**PGH**