

**Western Images
of
Others and Otherness**

WESTERN IMAGES OF OTHERS AND OTHERNESS

Paul G. Hiebert

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

The Mending Wall

Before I build a wall I'd ask to know
What was I walling in or walling out
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.

Robert Frost

“We would rather have our daughter marry a non-Christian white than a Christian non-white.” These were the words of white American evangelical parents who had grown up in the church. How can such sinful attitudes persist after generations of Christian teaching—or are they sinful? And why does ‘race’ matter when it comes to marriage if two persons love one another? Our everyday relationships with other people are deeply shaped by how we see them—by who we think they are, and who we think we are. But who are we?

Constructing Identities

In large measure we are who our society says we are. We all live in communities made up of different kinds of people: women and men, tall and short, young and old, dark and light skinned, long and short nosed, poor and rich. Some of these differences are innate, others acquired. Most we ignore, or note only in passing. Others we highlight to organize our society. It is these that our society uses as markers to give us our identities as persons in social contexts. They define who we are and how we should behave. They set us apart from ‘others,’ and shape how we see and relate to them. In other words, our identities as persons and as groups of people and the expected relationships between us are social constructs.

Societies generally take note of social variables, such as wealth, religion, and political views in creating identities and social categories. They also take note of biological variables, such as gender, physical features such as color, and age as markers. In the case of biology, it is not the biological realities that determine the social categories we use to think and live with, but the biological markers our society takes note of, and the categories it creates on the basis of these that give people their identities.

Social categories are built by establishing oppositions—by showing the differences between “us” and “others.” Each society and each age recreates its “others” in order to define itself. Edward Said notes,

Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of “other” is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies (1995, 332).

Many social identities are hierarchically ordered. For example, class, caste, gender and ethnicity are generally ranked, with the powerful at the top. For the most part, it is those who have the power to define the categories and impose these on a society as a whole that define themselves as more ‘human,’ ‘advanced,’ and ‘superior.’ Over time, people come to see these categories as innately real because these shape and explain their collective experiences. The excluded and oppressed have their own views of who they are, but these views are generally ignored by the dominant community.

One of a person’s primary socio-psychological identities is ethnicity—the feeling that she or he is part of a group because the members are the ‘same kind’ of people. This ‘consciousness of kind’ is based on the belief that the group shares the same heritable, unchangeable characteristics. Often these are thought to be “based on a myth of collective ancestry, which

usually carries with traits believed to be innate” (Horowitz 1985, 52). In other words, members share the same ‘blood.’ Often ethnicity is associated with language, religion and particular cultural practices which form a common heritage. One or more of these markers may serve as sources of ethnic divisiveness that leads to disdain, discrimination, accusations of inferior ancestry, and violence between ethnic groups.

Racism is an extreme form of ethnocentrism, which is particularly oppressive. George Fredrickson writes,

It originates from a mind set that regards “them” as different from “us” in ways that are permanent and unbridgeable. This sense of difference provides a motive or rationale for using our power advantage to treat the ethnoracial Other in ways that we would regard as cruel or unjust if applied to members of our own group (2002, 9).

In other words, racism is what happens when ethnicity is seen as inherent and hierarchical.

Both ethnic hostility and racism shape and are shaped by how people see and relate to Others they encounter in everyday life, but there is much more to them than this. They are institutionalized in social and cultural structures of domination that divide peoples into different categories on the basis of what are thought to be unalterable characteristics. An analysis of how EuroAmericans have viewed Others, however, can help us study the complex structures that make up ethnocentrism and racism. In this chapter we will draw on Bernard McGrane (1989), and look at some of the historical forces that have shaped how Europeans and North Americans have viewed Others over the past few centuries and how these perceptions have led to the racism that now plagues our societies. We will then examine ways to change our perceptions of Others to build bridges of understanding and love between us.

European Encounters with Others and Otherness

People have always had stereotypes of their Others. In the sixteenth century Sebastian Münster described the Scotch as faithful and vengeful; the Jews prudent but envious; the Persians steadfast but disloyal, the Egyptians stable and crafty; the Greeks wise but deceitful; and the Spaniards drunken, violent and sophisticated. In 1527 Henry Agrippa declared, “In singing also the Italians bleat, the Spaniards Whine, the Germans Howl, and the French Quaver (Harris 1968, 399-400).”

During the High Middle Ages educated Europeans saw foreigners in two ways. One was ‘monsters.’ North Europeans had many stories of humanoids who lived in the forests and prairies, and were embodiments of evil forces (Jeffrey 1980). They spoke of *satyr* (half human-half goat), *pyrs* (hairy woodmen), water-sprites, the Old Norse *þviðr*, the Scandinavian *bergrisar*, trolls living under bridges, giants in mountain castles, ogres, and werewolves. After the coming of Christianity, these monsters were seen as the “descendants of Cain.” The second category was ‘infidels’. Muslim armies had taken Palestine, and were in Spain and attacking Vienna. They were clearly humans, but they had heard the Gospel and rejected it. Therefore, they had to be driven back and killed. The result was, in part, the Crusades.

The Age of Exploration (1500 - 1700)

European perceptions of the world changed radically at the end of the fifteenth century. Explorers, seeking new routes to the spices of India, discovered unknown lands and strange people not found on their maps. The age was one of exploration, and of redrawing physical and mental maps to include hitherto unknown lands and peoples.

Europe's encounter with Others during the Age of Exploration raised profound questions. Who were these Others? Were they humans? Did they have souls that needed to be saved? Could they be enslaved and killed, or was this murder? The encounter with new peoples raised questions not only of geography but also of sociology, economics, politics and theology.

The western commercial world saw the newly discovered Others as a source of goods and labor—of gold and slaves. European exploration was not random. The explorers were looking *for* something: namely spices, gold and labor. But what right did the Europeans have to enslave other peoples? Many argued that these Others were like children. Therefore the Europeans were justified in their colonial expansion in which they acted as parents, educating and managing the natives' wealth for the natives' own good (McGrane 1989).

The Christian response was that these beings were truly humans. If so, how should Christians relate to them? Were they children of Adam and Eve? If so, they needed salvation. If not, they might be humans untouched by the fall. The church concluded that these people were sinners in need of salvation, and the descendants of Adam and Eve. They were not Christian heretics who distorted the Gospel, nor Muslim infidels who rejected it. They had not heard the Gospel. They were 'pagans' and 'heathens,' who were potential Christians. The result was the birth of the modern mission movement, first by the Catholics and later by the Protestants.

Scientists took a different view of these Others. Science was becoming increasingly secular. The earth of the fifteenth century was seen as an island (Orbis Terrarum), made up of Europe, Asia and Africa, with the Holy City of Jerusalem in the center and God in control. This sacred space was surrounded by the dark, inhuman, evil void of the deep waters. Crossing the seas and discovering new lands radically changed how Europeans viewed the earth. Now, for the

first time, the world was seen as a uniform, continuous, secular space covered by continents and oceans. In this new world, Others were no longer ‘fallen’ and in need of redemption. They were secular humans who could be compared with other humans. In these comparisons they were seen as “barbarians,” and “savages.” It was western explorers who named and studied others and their lands.

Age of Enlightenment: (1800 –)

The definition of the ‘Others’ changed with the coming of the Enlightenment. The shift is epitomized in the experiences of Robinson Crusoe, the leading character in Daniel Defoe’s novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Crusoe was the quintessential Enlightenment man—solitary individual, Cartesian rationalist, and technological inventor (McGrane 1989, 44). After almost eighteen years alone on an island, he came across charred human bones on a beach. “Cannibals!” he thought. From the depth of his European body and soul he vomits. His initial reaction was that these were “beasts,” “savages,” and “evil”—a response that fit the Age of Exploration. By contrast, he was “human,” and “good.”

Crusoe decides to slaughter all the savages he can, but, on further reflection, he undergoes a worldview shift. He writes,

What authority or call had I to pretend to be judge and executioner upon these men as criminals, whom Heaven had thought fit for so many ages to suffer unpunished to go on; It is certain these people do not commit this as a crime; it is not against their own consciences reproving or their light reproaching them (Defoe 1961, 168).

Crusoe decides that it is wrong for him to judge other people by *his* standards. They must be judged in the light of *their own* morality and culture. But it is clear that his culture is more advanced, and these people need to be taught true morality.

When Crusoe rescues one of the cannibals, he exercises the sovereign right of the Explorer and names him—he is “Friday,” and he will address Crusoe as “Master.” Thereby Crusoe transforms the stranger from a nameless *savage* who exists beyond the boundaries of humanity and civilization, into Friday, a *primitive human being*, who is a subordinate member in Crusoe’s world. Crusoe teaches Friday English, and gives him a place to live half way between Crusoe’s house and the forest inhabited by beasts and cannibals. Friday is awestruck by Crusoe’s gun and wants to worship it. Crusoe teaches him that it is not miraculous, and can be explained in natural terms.

In their daily encounters, Crusoe is increasingly forced to recognize Friday’s full humanity. How, then, can Crusoe account for the differences between them? His answer is that Friday is unenlightened, therefore naked, primitive and non-Christian, while he is Enlightened, clothed and Christian. But Friday can be taught, and saved through Crusoe’s efforts. Typical of the enlightenment understanding, there is no mention of what Friday thought of Crusoe, or of Crusoe’s attempts to ‘civilize’ him.

Crusoe illustrates the transition to the world of the Enlightenment. Three fundamental shifts marked this change in the popular and scientific worlds. First, Others were no longer ‘savages,’ but ‘unenlightened,’ and evil was no longer ‘sin,’ it was ignorance. The earlier distinction between refined-Christian versus idolatrous-savage was replaced by the *civilized-European* versus the *superstitious-ignorant-primitive*.

Second, in time the others became ‘aboriginals.’ They represented humans who had not evolved as those who lived in the West. These Others still lived in the ‘stone age.’ They were living fossils. But if these others are now like European ancestors once were, they help modern

people understand their own story. Joseph Conrad captures this view in his description of Africa.

We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. . . . But suddenly as we struggled around a bend, there would be a glimpse of peaked grass roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands, clapping, of feet stomping, of bodies swaying. . . . It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. . . . They howled and leaped . . . but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship (1950, 105).

EuroAmericans of the time saw the world as a great museum (McGrane 1989). In the Amazon they saw their remotest ancestors; in New Guinea, they saw stage two, and so on. The people of the world reveal *their* history, and the only audience that can understand the play is, of course, “them.” They had the benefit of hindsight: they know how the story ends, they *are* how the story ends. It was clear to scientists that western civilization was the most evolved of all cultures. In this light, the colonial venture was not oppressive. It was the benevolent efforts of enlightened people to help the Others join them in their full humanity.

But there remained in the minds of some a gnawing doubt. Was it possible that savages were Nob Savages who were happier than modern humans? Herman Melville captured this doubt in his description of the encounter of a French admiral and a native 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 Frenchman, and the poor tattooed savage. . . . At what an immeasurable distance, thought I, are these two beings removed from each other! 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, “insensible as he is to a thousand wants, and removed from harassing cares, may not the savage be the happier man of the two?” (1974, 33).

The third shift was that the Others became Children. They could be enlightened through education by western parents and teachers. This justified the colonization of the world to bring light to those trapped in darkness and ignorance.

At the heart of the Enlightenment was science, which was assumed by most modern people to provide objective and true knowledge. They believed it discovered differences that exist in nature itself. Its definitions of things had an aura of reality and truthfulness about them that traditional taxonomies did not. It told people how things ‘really are.’

As Eloise Meneses (chapter 2) and Jenell Williams Paris (chapter 4) show, the triumph of science in the natural fields opened the door for the scientific study of humans. In 1735 Carl Linnaeus included humans as a species in the primate genus, and tried to divide them into varieties. This opened the way for scientific racism, which saw humans as part of the animal kingdom rather than as children of God endowed with spiritual capacities other creatures did not have (Fredrickson 2002, 57). In 1863 The Ethnological Society in England split over the question of whether human beings were ‘of one blood,’ or different species descendent from different primates. The Anthropological Society of London held that Negros were a different species from Europeans (Reining 1970,5). By the end of the century, however, anthropologists affirmed the biological unity of human being. Christians argued, on the basis of Genesis, that all humans were of one kind.

Eloise Meneses, in chapter two, traces how the study of humans emerged as a science, and how this took the form of racial determinism. The study of race became a central object of scientific study. People were not humans to be known personally. They were objects to be counted, analyzed and reduced to general categories, laws and theories. They were lumped into anonymous collectives in which particularities were eliminated by definition, and broad generalizations formulated. The result was the theory of racial determinism and modern racism.

Science organized races, like it did all animal species, in terms of a hierarchy. Rudyard Kipling captures this view of life. “Mule, horse, elephant, or bullock, he obeys his driver, and the driver his sergeant, and the sergeant his lieutenant, and the lieutenant his captain, and the captain his major, and the major his colonel, and the colonel his brigadier commanding three regiments, and the brigadier his general, who obeys the Viceroy, who is the servant of the Empress” (quoted in Said 1995, 45). With regard to race, the categories were ranked along a hierarchy from inferior to superior, from dark to light skin, from curly to straight hair, from much to little body hair. This was used to justify conquest, colonialism and slavery. The inferiors must be treated as inferiors. In colonialism this led to the standard rationalizations:

[T]he natives are lazy; they do not respond like civilized men to the offer of wages; they need to be taught the virtues of civilized forms of labor by means other than those appropriate to civilized man. . . Being more childlike than Europeans, it is dangerous for natives to have free access to alcoholic drinks. . . Such people, if given a chance, prefer to walk rather than to ride, they like to sleep on the cold ground rather than on warm beds; they work in the rain without feeling wet, work in the sun without feeling hot, and carry loads on their heads without getting tired. Life is not so dear in these people as to Europeans; when their children die, they are not so deeply disturbed and when they themselves suffer injury, it does not hurt as much as it does in the civilized man (Harris 1964, 135).

The dominant community created the racial categories, and imposed it on the powerless. Moreover, the powerful use defining characteristics that favor themselves over the others. It was Whites who defined and named themselves, and named others ‘non-whites’ and ‘colored’. Whites studied nonwhites, not the other way around. Because whites were doing the studying, they assigned what they saw as their characteristics to the highest rank. EuroAmericans were the normal humans, the standard against which the others are measured. They were Occidental, civilized, law abiding. The opposite characteristics were assigned to their Others. Others were

Oriental, uncivilized, primitive and ruled by passions, not reason. In doing so, Whites defined themselves over against their Others. Their classifications reinforced the sense of the otherness of the Others, particularly since that otherness was defined in terms of what were seen as innate, unchangeable characteristics, and overlooked similarities and commonalities between peoples.

Some scientists argued that even though some races are inferior, they could be perfected and made potentially equal to the higher races. Give enough time and teaching, the inferior races could be civilized and come to resemble their European conquerors. This led to notions of the “White Man’s burden. Many who argued against slavery in the U.S. did so not on the basis of the equality of all humans, but on the humanitarian argument that the inferior should be helped, not enslaved, by the superior. Christians like Count J. A. De Gobineau argued that people from other races could be converted because Christianity appeals to the lowly and simple, and could be understood and accepted by the lowest types of humans. But, he argued, this does not mean that in other matters they are equal to Europeans.

But racial identities were also contested. The powerless had their own classifications and definitions of themselves, even though in public life they had to live with the definitions of themselves given them by the dominant community. The powerless lived with a tension of who they really were. The dominant community had no such crisis. Its members were secure and comfortable in their identity. In fact, they often saw no problem with racism, and assume that because it was no problem it simply was, and they are doing well by showing kindness to Others.

Scholarly classification helped create a particularly virulent type of racism. What counts in racism is not so much about what people are or think, but what they are shaped to be and to think. Social identities are not only mental images of self and other. They are social constructs

based on contests involving concrete political issues such as immigration laws, legislation of personal conduct, legitimization of violence, the content of education, and the direction of foreign policy. In Europe the result was colonialism in which Others were ruled in order to improve their lot in life by making them more like White Euro-Americans. The West defined all Others, reconstructed their histories, and determined how they should progress. In the end, two-thirds of the world was ruled by a few European countries. The inequality of races and the necessary domination of the many by the few was assumed by the end of the 19th century.

In the end such classifications and hierarchy dehumanize Others—they are objects to be studied and controlled, not humans to relate to. George Orwell writes,

When you walk through a town like this—two hundred thousand inhabitants, of whom at least twenty thousand own literally nothing except the rags they stand up in—when you see how the people live, and still more, how easily they die, it is difficult to believe that you're walking among human beings. All colonial empires are in reality founded upon that fact. The people have brown faces—besides they have so many of them! Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects? They arise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then they sink back into the nameless mounds of the graveyard and nobody notices that they are gone. And even the graves themselves soon fade back into the soul (1956, 251).

The Enlightenment deeply influenced western Christians whites. Christians led the fight against slavery and human exploitation. They were also shaped by the world around them. Enlightenment attitudes were used to justify segregated churches, and even slavery. They supported the mission movement, and saw whites as uniquely called to propagate Christianity and Civilization around the world (Taber 1991). Missionaries sacrificed their lives to bring the Gospel to people around the world, but many took for granted the racial superiority of whites, and opposed intermarriage with the 'natives.' Henry Venn, a leading missionary to India, wrote

that the white missionary was “another and superior race than his converts” (Taber 1991, 62). All this must be said, but as Lamin Sanneh (1993) points out, many of the missionaries were concerned with communicating the Gospel to other peoples. They lived with the people and often defended them against oppression by business and government. Moreover, by translating the Bible into native languages, communicating to them a universal gospel, and baptizing the converts into the global church, the missionaries dignified the people, and helped them more than other westerners to preserve their cultural identities.

The Age of Post-Enlightenment (1930 –)

The Enlightenment reached its peak at the end of the nineteenth century. Two world wars, and the rise of anti-colonial and nativistic movements began to call the enlightenment project into question. Moreover, prolonged encounter with people in other cultures led Westerners, in their encounters with Others, to increasingly see them as fully human, and their cultures as having much worth. This was true of Crusoe who came to see Friday increasingly as a human.

To acknowledge the full humanity of other peoples raised new questions. “How could the Others be equal to us and yet remain Other?” Enlightenment scholars studied people from their scientific point of view. Now they tried to see the world through the eyes of the people they were studying. The Others now became *natives*. Others were no longer primitive. They were fully rational beings having their own autonomous cultures. The word ‘civilization’ associated with a hierarchical view of peoples was rejected in favor of ‘culture’ in which all are different but equal. Cultures are now seen as unique and autonomous. Each is seen as discrete, bounded and

self-contained, and functions to maintain a harmonious society. Cultures are also seen as morally neutral. People in one culture should not judge other cultures. To do so is ethnocentric and imperialistic.

This post-Enlightenment view of Others is an important corrective to the arrogance and oppressions of the past, but it leaves Others as simply *others*. There is an insurmountable wall between Us and Them. In a world of diversity, the question is how can people of different communities build a world of harmony, justice and love. The underlying notion that race is natural, stable and inherent is false. Identities are not natural and stable, but constructed and contested. But to say that human realities are constantly being made and unmade is unsettling and leads to fear. Reactions to this fear lead to patriotism, xenophobia and chauvinism. Said asks,

Can one divide human reality, as human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly? By surviving the consequences humanly, I mean to ask whether there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into “us” . . . and “they.” (1995, 45).

A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF OTHERS

Christians must address the issues of racism, injustice and hostility, and show how humans of different kinds can live together in peace and justice, or the Gospel becomes Good News only for a few—the powerful. They must address the sin of racism in the church. Too often they have been influenced more by the world in which they live than by the Word of God. They must not see others as savages, primitives or irreconcilably other. How then should they view Others?

The Oneness of Humanity

First, Christians must constantly reaffirm the biblical teaching that *at the deepest level of identity all humans are one*. On the surface they are males and females, blacks, browns and

whites, rich and poor, old and young, but underneath these differences they are all fully human. This oneness of humanity is declared in the creation account (Gen 1:26), and affirmed by the universalism implicit in the Old Testament (Gen. 12, Ps. 67, 72:17, 148:11-13, Is. 11:10, 19:23-25, 45:22, 56:7, 60:3, 66:18, Jer. 4:2, 33:9, Micah 4:1-2, Haggai 2:7). In Christ and in the New Testament the implications of this common humanity are worked out more fully.

In affirming the oneness of humanity, Christians must not deny the great difficulty in understanding people in other cultures. It is easy to say that they love them when they have few deep relationships with other people. Far too often they claim to know what others are thinking and feeling, when, in fact, they are totally wrong. The more people study cultural differences, the more they realize how difficult it is to see others as humans like themselves, and to build deep inter-ethnic relationships of mutuality and love, but the more they see the necessity to do so.

The Oneness of Christians

Scripture leads to a second conclusion, *in the church believers are members of one new people (ethnos)*. In Christ God's Kingdom has come to earth (Matt. 4:17-25). A new age is at hand. The church is the sign and manifestation of that Kingdom, and all who follow Jesus as their Lord become members of a new people. John Stott writes, "For the sake of the glory of God and the evangelization of the world, nothing is more important than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, God's new society (1979,10).

Peter, when he went to the house of Cornelius, learned that the church is a new community not based on the old identities of this world. His 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)."

For Paul, unity and living as fellow citizens in the new kingdom are the way the church demonstrates that it is indeed the church. In Ephesians Paul describes the hostilities that divide humans (2:11-12), shows how Christ brought those hostilities to an end (2:13-18), and argues that Christians united in Christ are God's object lesson to the world (2:19-22). 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). It should come as no surprise that in the churches Paul planted, Jews, Greeks, barbarians, Tracians, Egyptians and Romans were able to feel at home. This mutual acceptance of Jews and Gentiles in the church was itself a testimony to the world of the transforming power of the Gospel. Paul says that in Christ, Christians *are* one body (Eph. 4:4). If they are not part of the body, they are not a part of Christ. This unity of a shared new life in Christ bridges the human distinctions of ethnicity (Gal 2:11-21), class (1 Cor 10:11) and gender (Gal 3:28, Acts 2:44f, 4:32). William Rader writes, "Ephesians sees the church as the community in which the deepest hostility between men was healed. . . . When the church views herself in the light of Eph. 2:11-22 then it is impossible for her to be conformed to the divisions which exist in society. It is her nature to be the place where divisions are healed" (1978, 253, 255)."

The importance of the unity of and fellowship within the church is seen in Christ's high priestly prayer. On the eve of his death he is not concerned for himself, but for his followers. He prayed,

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them ;even as you have loved me (John 17:22-23).

The unity of the church is not a by-product of the Good News, it is an essential part of the Gospel.

During this time when the Kingdom of God has come but not in its fullness, Christians continue to live in two worlds, in the kingdoms of this world and in the Kingdom of God. The former is the temporary, the latter is eternal. The identities of Christians in this world (the old *aeon*) are relativized because they are passing away. The Christian's new identity as a member in the family of Christ is eternal, and takes precedence over all earthly identities.

Tearing Down Race Walls

If races and racism are socially constructed, they can be deconstructed. To do so, however, is not easy. Christians must deal with both their personal perceptions of themselves and others, and the social systems in which they live that divide people into hostile groups. To start with they must examine their own attitudes towards race and racism. They then must transform the sociocultural systems that perpetuate racism to bring reconciliation, love and peace between the people of the world.

To deal with perceptions of themselves and others, Christians must begin examining their understanding of their social identities. They are daughters and sons, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, teachers and students, pastors and parishioners, merchants and customers, Chinese, Nigerians, Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Anglo Americans. They activate each identity in appropriate social contexts. They do not act as husband or wife to students in class, or as teachers to presidents of the United States.

They must also examine how they prioritize these social identities. Some are primary, some more surface identities. One person may be a male-motorcyclist-American-Democrat, in

that order. Another may be a Baptist-mother-teacher-gardener. When identities come into conflict, people choose one identity at the expense of the other. For example, when the Christian parents said they would rather have their child marry a non-Christian White than a Christian African American, they were saying that their ethnic identity was deeper than their Christian identity.

Christians must learn to see their primary identity as human beings. When they meet Others, they must see them first as fellow humans, and only secondarily as males or females, Americans or Arabs, rich or poor. In reaching out to the lost, Christians must meet them as the deepest level of their common humanity.

Christians must also learn to see their primary identity as Christians. When they meet other Christians, they must see them as brothers and sisters in the same family. This belonging to a new community is their eternal identity. All others are of this world and will pass away. In other words, their oneness with other Christians is deeper than the identities that divide them on earth, such as ethnicity (Jew or Gentile), class (slave or free), and gender (male or female), which are not eternal. In the church, at least, Christians should manifest this eternal reality, and not be captive to the world around them.

How can Christians learn to see their world this way? They cannot expect new believers to immediately put their new identity in Christ at the deepest level of their hierarchy of identities. Learning to see others as truly humans, and as members of the same family must be an intentional part of all discipling processes. Christians must begin by seeking relationships with people outside their circles. They must learn how to build relationships with Others by asking others about themselves, and seeking to learn to know them, rather than talking about themselves. They

need to build multi-ethnic fellowships, and work to break down the walls that divide them. Their churches must model the oneness of the body of Christ. New Christians must be led to deal with their racism, for it is sin. It divides the body of Christ, and it closes the door to effective witness to nonbelievers. And all this must be modeled by those who are mature in faith.

But Christians must do more than tear down the walls that divide people so deeply. They need to celebrate their oneness and build relationships of unity and love. If their primary identities are ethnic, cultural and national, they may gather for worship and fellowship, but they know that when tensions arise, these underlying differences will divide them, and they will be ready to war against one another. If, on the other hand, if 'human' and 'Christian' are their primary identities, they can celebrate ethnic, gender and cultural differences knowing that when problems arise they will remain united.

In the body of Christ, unity in the body of Christ does not rest in uniformity, but the common 'blood' which Christians have in Christ. They may disagree and quarrel, but neither can take away that identity from the other. Unity in the church that breaks down walls of ethnicity, gender and class takes place wherever Christ is Lord of our lives. Philip Yancey writes, "A society that welcomes people of all races and social classes, that is characterized by love and not polarization, that cares most for its weakest members, that stands for justice and righteousness in a world enamored with selfishness and decadence, a society in which members compete for the privilege of serving one another—this is what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God (1995, 253)."

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