

Social Issues: Celebrating Ethnic Diversity

Understanding Ethics: A Christian Perspective

A 5 step approach

- 1) What is the issue and why is it relevant?
- 2) How can we understand the issue better?
- 3) What are the key principles and values at stake?
- 4) What is the distinctive contribution from a Christian ethical perspective?
- 5) How should the ethical response be – e.g. from (a) Christian journalists in mainstream news media? (b) Christian communication workers in church media? (c) Christian local churches?

Step 1: *Identifying the issue*

What is the issue and why is it important?

- What is 'racism'?
 - Racism in general terms consists of conduct or words or practices which disadvantage or advantage people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin.
- Why is this issue important?
 - In its more subtle forms, racism is as damaging as in its overt forms.

Step 2: Understanding the issue

How can we understand the issue better?

-Historical background:

1) Slavery in America:

Slaves were regarded as «property», «animals», or «children».

2) German anti-semitism:

The Nazi ideology with its theory of race and land («blood and soil») led to «Holocaust».

3) South African apartheid:

Traditional Afrikaner history (sense of divine destiny) and theology (theory of race).

Step 2 – cont'd

-Current challenges:

- 1) *Racial attitudes and tensions based on colour, culture and ethnicity, e.g. in Western Europe and US.*
 - This is related to issues such as: (a) immigration, (b) race relations, (c) institutional racism, (d) police and the criminal justice system, and (e) employment practices.
- 2) *Racial attitudes and tension based on traditional ethnicity / tribalism, e.g. in Africa:*
 - Do we advantage or disadvantage people because of their ethnic origin?
 - What about marginalized people groups?

Step 3: Analysing the issue

What are the key principles and values at stake in this issue?

- How do we define a human being – in theory and in practice?
 - Does colour, culture and ethnic origin play a role in our theology / philosophy and in our ethics...?
- How do we relate to our neighbour – when he / she is different to us in terms of colour, culture and / or ethnic origin?
 - Cf. attitudes, conducts, practices, words etc.

Reflections / discussions

- How are «marginalized people groups» treated in our societies?
- The Danish photographer Jacob Holdt has documented ethnic tensions and racial attitudes in various countries (including US, Europe, Latin-America and Africa). He actually claims that there are marginalized people («black racism») also in a country like Uganda:
 - The Banyabindis, the Banyabutumbis, the Basongoras, the Batwa Pygmes
 - <http://www.american-pictures.com/gallery/uganda/index-uganda.htm>
- How would you respond to such a critique?

Step 4: Contributing to the issue

What is the distinctive contribution from a Christian ethical perspective?

- 1) God is the God of creation – the unity of the human race.
- 2) God is the God of history – the importance of ethnic and cultural diversity.
- 3) God is the God of revelation – respect for cultural diversity but not relativism in terms of truth claims.
- 4) God is the God of redemption – the present ethnic diversity within the global church and the future hope of perfect justice, reconciliation and peace («schalom»)

Step 4 – cont'd

- «Only a true theology, the biblical doctrine of God, can deliver us from racism. *Because* he is the God of creation, we affirm the unity of the human race. *Because* he is the God of history, we affirm the diversity of ethnic cultures. *Because* he is the God of revelation, we affirm the finality of Jesus Christ. *Because* he is the God of redemption, we affirm the glory of the Christian church.»

John Stott: *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (2006), p. 291

Step 5: Responding to the issue

How should our ethical response(s) to the issue be?

Three case studies:

(a) Christian journalists in mainstream news media?

- To what extent would that response be different from other journalists?

(b) Christian communication workers in church media?

(c) Christian local churches?

The ethical responses should be both in terms of (1) reflections, (2) attitudes, and (3) actions.