

ARTICLE FOR GAZETTE
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Those who study education theory know that children progress through stages of learning. Try to teach a three year old how to read. It usually is not productive because three year olds haven't developed mental readiness for that task. A picture book is more appropriate for them. Although you can sometimes teach young children to read, it takes an enormous amount of time and effort. If you wait until the child is ready, the child picks up the skill very quickly. This is called age level learning or age specific learning.

I believe societies also go through stages of maturation. My seminary professor David Lochhead talked about how societies develop. First there are isolated communities of people who don't relate to each other outside their own group. This is a culture of isolation. It works when population is small and people don't need to interact with each other.

However, if one group becomes a threat to another whether through lack of access to food, land, resources, knowledge, or religious stance, then hostility develops between them. They tend to demonize each other and war often ensues. This is a culture of hostility.

The next stage is recognition of value in each other despite differences, but defining one's own society as superior. This leads to a culture of competition.

The fourth stage is the ability to work together for larger goals that meet the needs of both groups without denying either group their identity and dignity. This is a culture of partnership.

Jesus calls us into a culture of partnership. He welcomed those outside of the accepted belief system—Samaritans, Gentiles, those who didn't measure up to the standards of religion. He called for extending caring to those in need, no matter who they were. He challenged his followers to love their enemies. It is clear that he valued the work even of those who were not his followers, for he said in Mark 9:40, "Whoever is not against us is for us." Building on the words of Isaiah, he called people to open their eyes to see the new thing that God is doing among us.

As we approach the high and holy time of Easter, the celebration of Jesus' triumph over forces of evil and death, we remember his words to us to open our eyes to see how God is at work among us bringing into being a new creation of love and justice, of joy and service, of respect and dignity for all. We don't have to remain trapped in old patterns. We are ready to move beyond isolationism, hostility, and competition to solve the problems of our communities. We don't have to find our strength and unity through opposition to an enemy but can join together in positive goals. We can be partners with each other and with Christ in resurrection living.