



## What is the “False Self”? by Richard Rohr

**T**HE FALSE SELF is all the things we pretend to be and think we are. It is the pride, arrogance, title, costume, role, and degree we take to be ourselves. It's almost entirely created by our minds, our cultures, and our families. It is what's passing and what's going to die, and it is not who we are. For many people this is all they have—but all of it is going to die when we die.

When we buy into the false self and overidentify with it, we have to keep overidentifying with it, defending it, and promoting it as “the best.” The false self is overidentified on a social level, a corporate level, a national level, an ethnic level. There is the Catholic false self, the Protestant false self, the American false self—we can pick on whatever group we want.

Many people in the United States really think that God has shed unique grace on our country—but have they ever walked outside our borders?

There's plenty of grace to the North and the South, in Europe and Africa. Grace is everywhere! When I was growing up as a Catholic boy in Kansas, we viewed all Protestants as heretics who were going to hell, but then I grew up and met a few nice Methodists, and I found out they thought I was going to hell too! It's just laughable.

We have to undercut the illusion right at the beginning, and when we do that, we discover the True Self “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). Our True Self in God becomes our touchstone and absolutely levels the playing field. It gives us a new set of eyes.

We each have different faces and different colors of skin; some of us have hair, some of us don't; some are tall, some are a little shorter. If we are living out of the false self, all we can do is measure, compare, evaluate, and label. That's what I call dualistic thinking, and it's where our world lives. Many people think

that all they have are these external costumes—but when we put on the eyes and mind of Christ, we have a new pair of glasses. We can look around and know that the world is filled with infinite images of God. Isn't that a nicer world to live in? It's the ultimate political-social critique.

I hope we're all moving in the direction of knowing who we really are, letting go of our preoccupation with how we look or measure up. As we come to a deeper acceptance of our True Self, we know our identity comes from God's love, not from what other people think or say about us. There's nothing wrong with wanting to present our best face; in fact, my mother would be disappointed if she thought I were saying otherwise.

We just can't take any of it too seriously. □

*Adapted from Richard Rohr's Immortal Diamond (Center for Action and Contemplation, Albuquerque, NM).*