

A Misappropriation of Racial Diversity by Blacks: Why Whites Ought Not Attend Black Conferences (or Read Reformed Black Authors)

By Xavier Pickett

Ethnically Diverse Relationships

From my experiences in attending evangelical conferences, there has always been a problem of diversification on many levels, including race relations. But before dealing with how Whites should relate to Blacks, particularly in a conference setting, we need to address the fundamental question/assumption that underlies any racial/ethnic diversity discussion: what is the nature and role of (ethnically diverse) human relationships?

First, it is important to discuss briefly what ethnic diversity is not. It is not a predominate representation of one racial/ethnic group among another ethnicity. Second, ethnic diversity is not evidence in merely the acknowledgement of the presence of various ethnicities, but rather ethnic diversity is the acknowledgment of the unique value of various ethnicities. Third, ethnic diversity is not the recapturing of every ethnicity under one roof, but the recognition and maximization of their unique purpose and gift under any roof.

A proper view of the body of Christ as it relates to human relationships will yield a better understanding of ethnic diversity. Human relationships viewed in light of a proper view of the body of Christ will allow every ethnic group to maximize their potential in making specific contributions for the entire body while also maintaining their own distinctiveness. Therefore, the purpose of ethnic diverse relationships must also lead to the maximization of ethnic particularity. Human relationships cannot flourish and mutual submission cannot fully occur, unless both parties are aware of the value and ways in which they are increasing in worth. In other words, a human relating properly to another in maximizing their worth is at the heart of human redemption or progression. Therefore, where there is not continued actualization and maximization, there cannot be healthy human interaction and relationships among different ethnic groups.

We can see this clearly in how two friends interact with one another. They do not relate to each other to bring about a common good as an ethereal project, but rather to gain from the unique strengths and experiences of the other person as a means of bringing about an intra-relational common good. To put it another way, a common good comes through the unique contribution(s) of the other person. Let me illustrate with a simple example. If my friend, John, is more patient than me, then I not only learn how to be patient from his unique contribution of patience to my life, but I also come to understand another deep facet of patience through a life different than that of my own. As a result, John's particular gift of patience to me did not only reshape my idea of what patience is, but also reshaped my entire life and how I understand God's forbearance afresh.

Mutual Submission in Socio-Theological Context

With all that in mind, we can now talk about more specific ways in which humans relate. Mutual submission is a subset of human relationships in and outside of the church. I want to focus on a certain context that reveals our true humanity through mutual submission. Mutual submission occurs based on genuine desires to realize the creative contributions and unique worth of another human being made in God's image. Human relationships that inhibit the flourishing of particular ethnic groups in their God-given distinctiveness are unhealthy and harmful. For it squashes the opportunity for any mutual sharing and learning as humans with particular divine identities.

Therefore, why should Whites submit to Black Reformed folks (as it is sometimes argued by some Blacks) when they (Whites) have already been submitting to other Whites with the same theological ideology as most Black Reformed people? In other words, if most Black Reformed folks are saying the same thing or parroting¹ what White Reformed folks are already teaching and writing, then why should White Reformed believers submit to Black Reformed folks?

Whites submitting to Black leadership should on a significant level entail submitting to original and creative contributions² of Blacks to everyone's life and ministry. If Black (Reformed) folks do not have any unique contribution to make to the theological enterprise as opposed to just adding a little bit of "Black spice" (usually through "Black" worship) on top of a "dull" dish white theology/praxis, then I would not want to submit to Black leadership either, if I were a White person.

More concretely, if Black Reformed folks are going to have conferences (and write books) with no essential difference or uniqueness compared to their White peers by dealing with the same tired ole' issues as them, then what is actually at these conferences for White people to submit to or learn from? Not only do we regurgitate these same tired ole' issues that hardly correspond to the distinct lives of Black folks, but we also attempt to bind the consciousness of Whites in the process.

As far as I can tell, if White folks are already submitting to the teaching of Sproul, Piper, MacArthur, etc and Black leaders are basically teaching what these men and others are writing, then what sense does it make for White folks to submit to Black leadership of this particular nature? (By the way, what does Whites submitting to Black leadership have to do with Shenequa or Tyrone who long to hear and receive redemption with fresh theological categories and trajectories that explain and address their real core concerns, which are normally excluded from Western European theological formulations and conversations? But I have said a little bit about that before.³) Therefore, as Black Reformed folks, we ought not

¹ Pickett, Xavier. "Reformed Oreos: A Call For More Self-Consciousness." *Reformed Blacks of America* (May 2007): 24 pars. 17 May 2007 <<http://www.reformedblacksofamerica.org/blog1/index.php?itemid=162>>.

² Mewborn, Michael. "Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun?" *Reformed Blacks of America* (June 2007): 12 pars. 25 June 2007 <<http://www.reformedblacksofamerica.org/blog1/index.php?itemid=220>>.

³ Pickett, Xavier. "More Chocolate In My Milk Please: The Necessity of Integrating Blackness and Reformedness." *Reformed Blacks of America* (May 2007): 24 pars. 15 May 2007 <

be surprise (or whine about) the fact that White people are not attending our conferences or reading our printed materials (e.g., books) if we are not actually saying anything that is significantly different and reflective of our own God-given experiences and creativity as Black men and women.

Are we to ask or expect Whites to submit to us simply because we are Black (without also acknowledging the intrinsic God-given value of Black existence)? Or if a race/ethnic distinction is not a valid (theological) category, then on what basis should Whites submit to Blacks in particular? Now I understand that some Blacks view Whites not attending their conferences as a lack of respect. But are Blacks respected simply because Whites now attend their conferences? I certainly hope not!

Moreover, many Black folks want to argue that they should be invited to speak at White conferences on the grounds of racial/ethnic diversity, but they then turn around and deny race/ethnicity as a meaningful Christian distinction. It is almost like saying, “We are not really ‘Black’ (in ascribing any meaning to that racial category); we are just Christians. But you should invite us anyway because we are ‘Black.’ ” In other words, if Blacks want to deny their racial identity as a significant theological anthropological category, then on what other basis should Whites invite those of a different race/ethnicity to speak at their conferences?

Why should T4G, Ligonier, or Desiring God, for instance, invite Black (Reformed) speakers if the Black speakers are just going to parrot⁴ what Whites have already been saying? For example, why should Ligonier invite a Black speaker to talk about the holiness of God when they already have R.C. Sproul teaching about God’s holiness better than most folks out there? I would suggest that White people ought not submit to us merely because we are Black (especially if some want to argue race/ethnicity is not all that important and want to get rid of racial categories for the doctrine of colorblindness instead), but rather because Black imago dei humans are divine gifts to the church, history, other ethnic groups and all of creation. This is so because we all (i.e. every ethnic group) need one another, even in how we particularly understand God, the world and ourselves. What is the benefit of my arm acting like my leg when I already have two legs? To put it another way, what is the ecclesial benefit to the whole if Blacks are thinking and functioning like a leg when the one body already has two legs?

http://www.reformedblacksofamerica.org/rbasite/downloads/More_Chocolate_In_My_Milk_Please_by_Xavier_Pickett.pdf>.

⁴ See “Reformed Oreos: A Call For More Self-Consciousness.”

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