



Culture Matters ...

Racial Diversity,

Relevancy,

and Contextualization

... in Worship

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Presentation Overview

Racial Diversity in Perspective
Culture Matters (in Worship)
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“I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne.”

Revelation 7:9



Racial Diversity in the United States, 2006

One Race + Two or More Race = 100%

How Racially Diverse is the United States?

White	= 73.9%
Black, African American	= 12.4%
American Indian, Native Alaskan	= 0.8%
Asian	= 4.4%
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	= 0.1%
Other	= 6.3%
Two or More	= 2.0%
Hispanic, Latino (of any race)	= 14.8%



Racial Diversity in Perspective



U.S. Population, Actual and Projected: 2005 and 2050

	2005	2050
Population (in millions)	296	<i>438</i>
Share of total		
Foreign born	12%	<i>19%</i>
Racial/Ethnic Groups		
White	67%	<i>47%</i>
Hispanic	14%	<i>29%</i>
Black	13%	<i>13%</i>
Asian	5%	<i>9%</i>
Age Groups		
Children (17 and younger)	25%	<i>23%</i>
Working age (18–64)	63%	<i>58%</i>
Elderly (65 and older)	12%	<i>19%</i>

Note: All races modified and not Hispanic; American Indian/
Alaska Native not shown. See "Methodology."

Source: Pew Research Center, 2008



“Human beings have always worshiped God in their Cultural milieu, and God has incarnated himself and Revealed himself to worshippers in settings that are Culturally familiar”. Pederito Maynard-Reid, Diverse Worship, pg. 30



Diversity in worship is not just about race and ethnicity; neither is culturally sensitive worship just about race and ethnicity. However, people often interchange the terms.



Culture is a way of understanding who we are; it is the way of life of a people. Culture is not biological or racial. Culture is socially learned. It is the means by which individuals or sets of human beings orient, organize, and conduct themselves cognitively, affectively and behaviorally in a given time and space.



Worship practices are as culturally conditioned as any other aspect of the human condition.

Worship is the self-expression of a particular church community in a public celebration of its faith. It has both vertical and horizontal dimensions.



“In worship, people’s cultural self-expressions are authenticated in the presence of God. If worship does not have its grounding in people’s lives and cultural experiences, it will remain foreign, imposed and irrelevant. ... Thus for worship to be relevant it has to be an integral part of people’s lives and culture.”

Pederito Maynard-Reid, [Diverse Worship](#), pg. 19



Religious Beliefs and Practices, By Race

(Source: The Barna Group, Ventura, CA – 2004)

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
Read the Bible in the last week	36%	59%	39%	20%
Attended religious service in past week	41%	48%	38%	23%
Prayed to God in the past week	81%	91%	86%	46%
Participated in a small group, past week	16%	31%	27%	13%
Bible is totally accurate (strongly agree)	36%	57%	40%	24%
Satan is not a living being (strongly disagree)	30%	27%	30%	14%
Jesus Christ sinned while on earth (strongly disagree)	37%	49%	35%	22%
Born again Christian	41%	47%	29%	12%
Atheist or agnostic	12%	5%	7%	20%
Aligned with a non-Christian faith	11%	12%	10%	45%



In the words of a 2004 Barna study:

Upon dissecting the role of faith in the lives of black Americans, we discovered that their faith in Christ has empowered millions of blacks to overcome challenges that might otherwise have been debilitating. The local church has been a major source of strength and directive leadership for the black community. Barna noted that black churches have helped blacks to focus on different values and priorities than those promoted by popular culture. "As a result, millions of blacks have found the inner strength to withstand hardships. ...



What distinguishes blacks in this nation from other racial groups is their more overt need for - and openness to - Jesus in the midst of a culture that until recently has been comparatively unsympathetic to their needs. As the nation's culture becomes more challenging for people of faith, and as the economic and demographic balance of the nation shifts, the lessons and victories won by black churches will likely serve as a beacon for all ministries in a time of increasing spiritual confusion and searching."



Should diversity be a goal of religious communities?

Perhaps homogeneity is necessary to produce religious vitality.

A distinct racial-ethnic identity is a source of strength and vitality, especially for religious communities composed of minority groups.

The role of the black church in fostering a collective identity and mobilizing individuals to social action demonstrates the strategic influence homogeneity can play for a minority group.

The religious communities of today's new immigrants play a similar role. After all, religion is a cultural phenomenon. If religious communities that have high participation and growing memberships are those that best address the culturally embedded preferences of a specific market niche then successful congregations and parishes will continue to be homogeneous.

How monochromatic is church membership? Racial-ethnic diversity in religious community *Sociology of Religion* 2003 by Kevin D. Dougherty





It is tempting to go to Scripture to discover the ideal paradigm for liturgical practices. The fact is, however, Scripture prescribes no one monolithic form or language of worship.



Biblical worship practice was diverse, reflecting the various cultural and apologetic environments of those gathered.



We do not find any liturgical order or obligatory form of Christian worship in the teachings of Christ or the writings of the New Testament.

The basic forms of Christian worship were developed from the Jewish synagogue services and other Jewish rites... Sabbath assemblies, festivals, prayers, & exhortations.



The Christian church is universal. In some ways, constant. Four universal, ageless, factors in worship....

- (1) An assembling or gathering of people of God to experience the divine presence of God with neighbors.
- (2) A celebration of festivals and sacraments.
- (3) The presentation of the Word in scripture readings, study and sermon.
- (4) Prayer



The church is also local

For centuries conversion to Christian faith required an African or Asian to discard indigenous ways as inferior and superstitious and adopt the “superior” Western European culture. But ...diversity can bring affirmation and inclusion.



The great experiment in North American liturgical circles is how to make worship a truly multicultural experience.

Continuing the Conversation ...



“The U.S. Christian Community has not taken the lead to endorse the acceptance and celebration of other cultures. Churches, rather than being outspoken on issues of racial justice and equality, have typically been silent or even worse, supportive of segregation.”

Patty Lane, *A Beginners Guide to Crossing Cultures: Making Friends In a Multicultural world*, pg.42.



“I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne.” (Revelation. 7:9)

*What does this mean for us here on Earth?
How can/ does/ should it shape our worship?*



How do we manage and live in the tension between constancy and diversity in worship? How do we move from the way it has always been to what God requires?