

FIEC Seminar

Something about me

- I am a second-generation Nigerian. I grew up in Nigerian Pentecostal church in London but also spent 3 years living in Nigeria in boarding school.
- I then went to uni and spent 4 years in Scotland. Which was very different. Only black person in this town I was in a super non-diverse part of Scotland, and it was the first experience in a situation like that. as part of a Vineyard Church
- I then went to Birmingham Alabama for seminary and spent another 4 years, where I spent most of my time in a Southern Baptist Church plant in a city with perhaps the ugliest racial history in all of America. This was a church that was specifically trying to seek racial reconciliation in light of the city's history.
- I then spent time with the coolest church in London, Brixton Local Church which was a church full of 20's and 30's mostly second generation African people who were a real mix of black British culture.
- Then in 2019, Brixton Local Church merged with Stockwell Baptist Church, which was a church full of 40's all the way up to 100 (my first funeral was for a woman who was 100). This was made up of largely first generation African and Caribbean people.

- While doing that, I have been involved with all kinds of partnerships with different churches.

Limitations of Seminar

- So I've had the blessing of doing church in a number of different contexts and cultures. That said, my experience is limited and so I want to say that up front.
- We will be focused on partnering within the local church.
- This will not be focused on the related and difficult issues of social justice or racial reconciliation.
- This will naturally focus on issues of partnering between African church culture and British church culture. That said the hope is that it would also be helpful for all kinds of other partnership across cultures.

The scale of the issue

The Church is not doing a good job of this. I know that this is not true for all people everywhere, but there does not appear to be much partnership across cultures.

In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. stated that 11am on a Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in all of America. Imagine that! In a society that was so segregated, the place that was most segregated was the church. And I have news

for you, all the way here in the UK and 60 years later, I think that hasn't changed at all. The church in the UK is very culturally segregated.

Churches are segregated. Even CU's are segregated. Separate worlds almost.

My own experience.

Challenges to partnership across cultures.

- Offence
- Danger of Being Inauthentic
- Tokenism
- Colour/culture blindness
- Cultural Pride (will lead to neo-colonialism)
- Indifference

Reasons To Partner Across Cultures

- Discuss in groups...
- The glory of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:11-21).- Jesus died to unite people. Partnership across cultures demonstrates the glory of God.
- As a foretaste of heaven (Revelation 7:9-10). This is God's design. God's will to be done on earth as also in heaven.
- To preserve our witness (John 13:35). In postmodern world, this will become increasingly a problem. Where people assume that we believe what

we believe because of our social location, a truly diverse church will be a powerful witness.

- To preach the Gospel of justification by faith alone (Galatians 2:11-14).
All Peter does is move tables. He doesn't say racist thing. He doesn't condemn the Gentiles. He doesn't write an insensitive blog article. He just moves tables. He just stops being willing to associate across cultures.
- As an expression of love and hospitality for one another (Romans 15:7).
Hospitality refers to the love of the stranger. Danger of etymology. But here helpful. We welcome one another in light of how Christ has welcomed us.
- That we might better glorify God together in our churches (1 Corinthians 12:12-20). A clue about how we are use our diversity. Our different cultures are God's idea so that we might better serve God.

Theological Reflections on Cultural Difference

And the first skill we must learn is to distinguish between what is biblically essential and what is not.

But it is not true that we should only care about what is biblically required and then everything else is theologically unimportant. Like everything else is merely stylistic. Even when things are not biblically mandated, their presence can be theologically important.

Instead, as it relates to partnership across cultures, we should think of differing traditions, which each have their own strengths and weaknesses that are theologically significant.

Examples (full of stereotypes)

Music Styles

There is a space for reverential and reflective music that is very didactic (Colossians 2:15-17) which is more reflective of white, British church culture.

Also a space for more exuberant worship that God actually commands us to which is reflected more in “black church” culture. (Psalm 66:1, 98:4)

Sermon Structure

There is a particular kind of preaching that you might call white British teaching. So one of the hallmarks is to be keep application to the end. You teach what the passage and you tend to end with okay “what do you do with this?” It understands that the last thing you say in a sermon has particular significance and so it wants to leave people with what they are meant to do with the Word. There is a desire for people to not just be hearers of the word but doers of the Word (Matthew 7, James 1:22). Wants people to leave the sermon with the application ringing in their ears. And that is absolutely important theologically.

But there are other cultural approaches to preaching. My preaching professor in seminary was an African-American preacher. And he had an entirely different approach to closing sermons that was steeped in the African American preaching tradition. And it isn't just different. It is theologically different. He would say in each sermon that the important thing was to point out how whatever it is relates to our future in glory. He would end each sermon by drawing out the point of the text and show it how it leads us to glory. So like you know in most of the hymns, no matter what the hymn is about, the last verse tends to end in glory. The important thing to leave people with in the African American preaching tradition was to leave people with biblical hope. And of course, there are sociological reasons why that is true for the African American tradition. But there are also biblical theological reasons why we might think that the Bible is written to give us hope (Romans 15:4, 14)

Sermon Feedback

Most white British churches are silent during the sermon. And there is some value in that. It reminds us that preaching is fundamentally a monologue not a dialogue. It is God speaking to us authoritatively through a man (1 Peter 4:11). It is a monologue.

But there is also something about feedback (more characteristic of black church culture) in church that reminds us of the need to immediately respond to God's Word. Preaching isn't a lecture. It is God's life-giving word (Acts 2:36-41).

What We Call our Leaders

Typically in white, British churches, pastors/elders are simply called by their name. This reminds us that leaders are servants and are not overlords (Matthew 20:25-28).

However, in "black church" traditions, typically the pastor is called "Pastor..." This is a way of expressing the truth that believers are called to honour our leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

How We Speak to Those Older Than Us

In white, British churches and culture generally we call significantly older people by their first name. This reminds us that we are united by Christ in such a way that there is no older and younger (Galatians 3:28).

However, in African church and culture, that is considered rude. Older people are never just called by their first name. This reminds us that even in the church there is a particular honour that we are to show to those who are older than us (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

Practical Steps Forward

- Be aware of your own culture.
- Learn to think theologically through cultural differences and find points of appreciation.
- Diversify friendships with ministry people in other churches.
- Visit other churches that are culturally different to your own.

QUESTIONS