

ETHNIC BLENDS **MARK DEYMAZ**

Roadblocks to Diversity

Mixing diversity into your local church is not easy. Nevertheless, as Christians, we are called to align the church with God's will, not our own. If we are to credibly proclaim the Gospel in an increasingly diverse and cynical society, we will have to get beyond one or more of the following roadblocks to ethnic blends.

False Guilt

I once attended a forum on race in which the presenters tried to convince me I was a racist (because I'm white), and I was a sexist (because I'm a male). I rejected the premise, but did come to recognize the inherent privilege (and responsibility) of being born a white male in America.

“Why are we so easily excited to work alongside diverse brothers and sisters abroad, but so often resistant to do so at home?”

Convenience

Recently, an evangelical leader said to me, “My neighborhood is white, and I don't want to feel guilty just because I feel called to reach my neighbors.” I agreed; he should not feel guilty. Nevertheless, I asked him to consider whether or not he would still “feel called” to reach his neighbors if they were black, Latino or Asian? The apostle Paul willed himself to become all things to *all* men so that he might win some *from all men* to Christ. Should we not follow his example?

Defensiveness

A pastor felt that the challenge to build a more diverse congregation overlooked the fact that his church was heavily invested in cross-cultural missions around the world. I explained this was not the case. When asked about the diversity of his staff, however, he paused long and hard. It's interesting: *Why are we so easily excited to work alongside diverse brothers and sisters abroad, but so often resistant to do so at home?*

Reflecting the Community

As a standard, some measure their success by the degree to

which their congregation reflects the racial makeup of the community. Nonwhite pastors, however, do not often accept this logic. They see it as language of expedience from those who are part of the majority culture.

Race Fatigue

Pastors and parishioners alike, even in healthy multiethnic congregations, often grow tired of the discussion. But should we teach the Word of God in its entirety, or just the parts that make us comfortable? Some will say, “Just preach the Gospel, and the rest will take care of itself.” But Paul not only proclaimed the Gospel, but the ramifications of it—namely, that Jews and Gentiles are to be one in the church for the sake of the Gospel (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:2-6). More than that, it was for preaching this message that he was ultimately arrested and gave his life (Acts 22:21-22).

It's Natural

A well-known pastor recently said, “I don't recommend trying to diversify your congregation; it's just too difficult. People want to go to church with others who are like them, and I don't think there's anything wrong with that.” But when did the difficulty of a biblical task become a reason to avoid its pursuit? Aren't you glad Jesus did not approach kingdom building with the same kind of attitude? Can you imagine him refusing to leave the comforts of heaven, saying, “No way, Father; the cross is just too difficult to bear?”

Building healthy multiethnic churches is about living beyond ourselves, and our abilities, in the supernatural, “according to His power that . . . work(s) within us” (Eph. 3:20). With this mindset, we can overcome the obstacles in pursuit of ethnic blends.

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