

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE UNIVERSAL BODY OF CHRIST

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By creation, all human persons have the image of God, which means they have the interpersonal capacity and equal inherent worth. Since the image exists at the individual level, we must view the created variants as “modes of the image.” Sex, race, size, intelligence, athletic ability, physique, age, and the like do not affect inherent worth and can therefore have no place in our attitude toward ourselves or other people. We do not have to be married to participate in the image, we do not have to become Jews to be a favored people, we do not have to speak English to be part of the kingdom, *etc.*

While the image exists at the individual level, it makes possible the social and eschatological dimensions of living. Relationship and purpose bring behavior into the picture, and the evaluation of behavior becomes necessary. Acts that impact fellowship and purpose are subject to ethical and moral considerations.

Honoring cultural variance, ethnic diversity, gender distinctions, and nationality differences does not imply that all behavioral differences in these arenas are equally valid, appropriate, and acceptable to Christian convictions. The criterion for acceptableness does not rest in human nature so much as in divine purpose. Human nature is capable of a wider range of behavior that value and purposes permit. Unlike animals, we are not constituted with a one-for-one relationship between nature and behavior. We live by values and purposes, not just by drives, so Christianity has a prophetic role in culture as surely as it does to the individuals, and not all cultures are created equal. Revealed values and purposes distinguish germane from non-germane matters.

Consequently, Christianity does not subscribe to multiculturalism and the moral neutrality of all diversity; that is, theology differs from the secular view of culture and diversity. Nevertheless, Christians are deeply concerned about creating unity across irrelevant diversity by using the attitude of Christ (Philippians 2:2-11) to overcome the divisive consequences of the self-centered, competitive mindset. In fact, salvation as reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:14-21) endeavors to create a new united mankind (Ephesians 2:15) by bringing us individually into personal relationship with God through Christ. Our role as Christians is to do what we can to realize this process wherever we can exert our influence to do so.

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