

Introduction

In recent decades, the issue of diversity on university campuses has become increasingly relevant to campus culture, student development strategies, and programming. It is no longer possible (if it ever was) to assume that one dominant cultural approach or perspective will adequately represent or guide every student's experience of meaning-making and of identity formation. Research in the fields of student development and educational theory are demonstrating how many different factors actually can or do affect students as they navigate their way to adulthood, thereby challenging institutions to acknowledge these differences and adjust their methods for the sake of effectiveness.

These shifts should not only be embraced on the basis of functionality or even human rights, though these are valid; there are also theological reasons for change. In the context of a Christian university, practices that are intentionally or unintentionally inhospitable to certain members of the community are an affront to the gospel that is the basis for Christian scholarship. In the book of Ephesians, Paul the Apostle writes that one of the key implications of the gospel is the making of a new people: "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two [Jew and Gentile], thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Eph 2:15b-16, 19) – a household that now thrives on the contributions of many diverse perspectives and gifts (Eph 4:16). The book of Revelation abounds with images of worship in which people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" have found their place at the throne of the Lamb (Rev 7:9). And the book of Galatians declares, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,

for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Biblical community that is envisioned as a singular, predominantly Western (and even male-dominated) expression of Christianity falls short of God’s intention. To be faithful to the gospel, Christian educational institutions must make every effort to affirm that the diversity and complexity of perspectives, experiences, and cultures that make up true biblical community exhibit the relevance of the gospel to every culture and every life – that is, the plan of God “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph 1:10).

Given this compelling biblical image of unity in diversity, it is even more important to consider how an academic institution like Trinity Western University might apply the biblical perspective and current research so that its corporate life together might be a reflection, a microcosm of God’s intention for the Church and ultimately for all people. In particular, the chapel program has the potential of promoting a mission-enhancing environment of unity in diversity in its public programs, in its training and mentoring programs, and in ongoing research and professional development. This paper will delineate some possible directions that could help shape a biblically faithful and culturally diverse chapel program.

Foundations

In *Good Practice in Student Affairs* (1997), Blimling, Whitt and Associates declare: “The need to foster community and skills for living in a multicultural society ... is a critical role for student affairs.”¹ Multiculturalism in contemporary society is far more complex than just appreciating the arts and traditions of another clearly defined historical ethnic culture, however. The dimensions of diversity are multifaceted and interrelated, and include such

¹ Gregory S. Blimling, Elizabeth J. Whitt and Associates, *Good Practice in Student Affairs*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 164.

factors as race (itself a complex and artificial category²), ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities and abilities, geographical origins (domestic or international), and age.³ To this list one can add a person's or group's level of acculturation (how much or how little they have assimilated their culture of origin and/or the dominant culture), the history of oppression associated with any of their own dimensions of diversity, language ability (especially in relation to Standard English), artistic differences, personal prejudices and stereotypes, socio-political factors, family experience and structures, religious background and commitment, and cultural values (toward time, human relationships, human activity, human nature, and the supernatural).⁴ Finally, the diverse ways in which people have engaged with technology is an important factor to consider in terms of a multicultural campus; in particular, the arrival to universities of the "Net Generation" – students whose ability to relate and think critically, and whose awareness of the world and its cultures, have been shaped by their on-line interaction with others around the world – will have an impact on the effectiveness and relevance of university programming.⁵

The purpose of such a list of factors is not to pursue a "niche market" approach to university programming. Such an approach would likely promote and solidify stereotypes rather than promote a campus culture where interaction and appreciation of the other is valued. Rather, such a list demonstrates the importance of developing an awareness of what contributes to the shaping of a person who becomes part of a campus (whether staff, student

² Paul R. Spickard. "The Illogic of American Racial Categories." In *Racially Mixed People in America*. Ed. Maria P.P. Root. (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), 13.

³ El-Khawas, Elaine, "Student Diversity on Today's Campuses." In *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession*. Eds. Susan R. Kornives, Dudley B. Woodard, Jr., and Associates. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 66.

⁴ Don C. Locke, "A Model of Multicultural Understanding." *Increasing Multicultural Understanding: A Comprehensive Model*. Multicultural Aspects of Counseling Series. (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 1-14.

⁵ Don Tapscott, "The Culture of Interaction." *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 55-81.

or faculty), and what kinds of diverse encounters they will experience that may affirm, dismantle, or transform their self-conception and view of the world. It recognizes what Williams acknowledges, that “behind every face ... is a story, a life whose complexities I can barely begin to understand at this point.”⁶ Such a list is both a challenge and an opportunity for every member of the community to embrace, in a deeper, fuller, and more personal way, the richness of the human story, and, from a Christian perspective, the amazing work of God in making sense of that story in the person and work of Christ. In this sense a community’s journey in understanding its diversity is a learning experience for everyone involved – educators and students:

In some ways they offer me more than I’ll offer them.... They teach me and they remind me: that I am one link in the chain of their education, and this means I am linked to all others in this community of educators. Here we are, held together by the lives of our students – lives incredibly fragile, remarkably hardy, complicated, and challenging – ours to know and understand for the asking.”⁷

An essential element of effective meaning-making and healthy identity formation is a thoughtful encounter with what is different, with the opportunity for reflection and dialogue.⁸ The challenge for the Trinity Western University chapel program is to be one context where that can experience can happen, recognizing that a truly transformational student experience will occur when the entire campus environment – formal education, residential and community programming, and leadership experiences – is infused with a commitment to making a safe place for diversity in community to be expressed and explored. Nevertheless, TWU’s chapel program could promote a hospitable environment for diversity by modeling,

⁶ Lee Burdette Williams, “Behind Every Face is a Story.” *About Campus*. (March-April 1998): 21.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Blimling and Whitt, *Good Practice*, 28.

in its corporate worship, an awareness, sensitivity and appreciation of its reality, and by initiating constructive dialogue regarding the nature and practice of biblical diversity.

Application

Public Programs

Chapel's public programs include the daily chapel services, Sunday Night Alive, some evening presentations, and a few "break-out" sessions throughout the year where students have the opportunity to interact more closely with the chapel speaker.

There are a number of ways in which the chapel services can more deeply reflect, and reflect on, the diversity of the campus and, even more, the diversity of God's people around the world. First, we should incorporate a more global representation of worship music and resources into congregational worship. This would require more investment in resources such as recordings and sheet music that represent global worship. One example is the worship collection, *Sing! A New Creation*, which includes hymns, contemporary songs, and global music from around the world.⁹ (Many other resources are available from publishers such as GIA Music.¹⁰) However, the more challenging factor in this respect is the need for ongoing training and education, both for leaders and for the congregation. For most leaders (including myself) it is very uncomfortable to lead a congregation in songs that are in another language than English, and to do so with some integrity to the original culture. As Locke observes, there can be significant differences in how cultures interact in a public forum, such as the contrast between the "polite," reserved, linear audience/performer participation of dominant North American culture and the interactive, "call-and-response," more circular

⁹ *Sing! A New Creation*. Song Collection. (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 2001)

¹⁰ www.giamusic.com.

model of African-American audience/performer participation.¹¹ Because of these differences, it is even more difficult to educate the congregation in how to participate meaningfully. For those who are part of the dominant culture, the experience is perceived as a novelty instead of an encounter with God. But to neglect other cultural expressions of worship for the sake of not excluding the dominant culture perpetuates the idea that, at least on our campus, congregational worship welcomes only those in the dominant culture. For this reason we must begin to carefully and patiently incorporate a variety of worship resources from around the world, with special attention to gently shepherding the congregation in how to meaningfully participate. One way to do this would be to include cross-cultural musical guests (such as a gospel choir, the African Children's Choir, or even worship leaders from a local congregation) in the chapel schedule. More importantly, this may involve a more intentional effort to include students from other cultures and backgrounds in the planning and leading of congregational worship. It is more than "affirmative action," seeking to include a certain number of students from other cultures on worship teams; it likely means intentional networking within programs that work specifically with students from other cultures, developing relationships that invite creative contributions and even leadership from these students, with the purpose of educating the whole chapel program about worship from a global perspective. Having developed these relationships, perhaps a worship team leader could invite a student or students to introduce and lead his or her team in a rehearsal of these international songs, or even to give leadership when those songs are introduced in chapel. Over time, a corollary of this effort would be that more students from other cultures would pursue participation in formal chapel programs, leading naturally to a more international face to the campus worship leadership.

¹¹ Locke, "Multicultural Understanding," 8.

A second way to increase the sensitivity to issues of diversity (especially those related to spiritual formation and worship) is to address them directly in chapel, with the opportunity in other venues to dialogue. This could include:

- Addressing issues specifically related to the identity development of men and women (including, but not limited to the typical topics of sexual temptation or body image; also, issues of sexual orientation, from a thoughtful Christian perspective)
- Addressing issues specifically related to the experience of students coming from other cultures or interacting with other cultures. This might take the form of testimonials (such as how an international student came to faith in Christ, or how a student's view of God's work has been widened because of his or her interaction with another culture).
- Addressing the challenge of living the Christian faith in a multicultural society, seeking to raise the question and provide the opportunity to reflect on what part of one's religious expression is a Scriptural absolute, and what part is a relative cultural expression.

For these issues to be most relevant and helpful for students, there must be some venue available in which students can interact and respond – forums, focus groups, and experiential learning opportunities, for example. These could be developed and delivered in partnership with other relevant departments in Student Life and with faculty such as Religious Studies, Psychology, or Counseling faculty.

Training and Mentoring

The issue of diversity affects the realm of student leadership training from two angles. First, there is the issue of challenging students (and staff) who are part of the dominant culture to think and act with a more global and historical perspective about worship, discipleship, and leadership. Second, there is the challenge for staff of developing sensitivity to how diversity affects the students who participate in the programs.

The first issue, helping participants to think and act with a more global and historical perspective, is obviously complex. It is more than simply giving students a set of resources from which they can draw, and instructing them to use them. They must have a meaningful and challenging encounter with global or historical worship in action, to experience and reflect on the way that it counters, enriches, and refines conceptions formed by previous experience.¹² Experiencing an Eastern Orthodox liturgical service that is saturated with incense, congregational participation, and the veneration of icons, for example, or participating in worship with a congregation of another culture, where a meeting often exceeds the typical service length of only 60 minutes and calls for a different kind of participation, can be a far more meaningful experience than simply reading about it or learning about it in a meeting or lecture. Two ways that such an experience could be built into a team's experience might be (a) as a Sunday morning team activity on the weekend of the Worship Retreat, and/or (b) as a Sunday morning team activity at any time in the semester. To give students an even richer cross-cultural, cross-traditional experience a time of fellowship with members of that congregation's "worship leaders" (whatever form of leadership that might take) could be arranged, in which students could ask questions about how "worship planning" and "worship leadership" functions in that congregational context. Finally, one of the Monday evening group meetings during the semester could be dedicated to discussion about the experience. I would recommend that each team experience one cross-cultural, and one cross-traditional encounter during its year of service.

A second way of widening students' understanding of the diversity within Christian worship is to initiate discussion with fellow students from other cultures about the chapel program itself. Students from non-dominant cultures or traditions could be invited to

¹² Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986), 142.

leadership team meetings to describe their experience in chapel in a way that invites dialogue, critique, and the gradual formation of a more widely encompassing approach to worship leadership in chapel.

There are a few strategies that would be valuable to pursue with regard to developing a sensitivity to students' uniqueness. First, staff could develop a growing awareness of the issues involved in diversity by including the reading of current literature on the topic within a regular diet of professional development. This can inform the ways in which programming for student leaders can be developed. For example, should women leaders be engaged in conversation about their experiences in a different way than men?¹³ Second, it would be valuable (in partnership with relevant Student Life departments and/or faculties) to pursue formal research into TWU students' experience with reference to cultural diversity, through surveys, focus groups, and other methods. Finally, staff could intentionally build habits into their weekly or monthly schedule that place them in personal, meaningful contact with students of non-dominant cultures – for example, by having lunch once a week at the Globe, TWU's international student programs venue. This kind of habit would be both an opportunity for the staff to learn about students' many cultures and how they are experiencing the dominant culture, and for staff to contribute to meaning-making conversations with students who are in the process of wrestling with their own identity as a “minority” on a “dominant culture” campus.

¹³ Nancy J. Evans, Deane S. Forney, and Florence Guido-DiBrito, “Josselson’s Theory of Identity Development in Women.” *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 65-66.

Conclusion

It must be said that the development of a worship program that is sensitive to and intentional about global and inter-traditional worship, as well as to the many other issues of identity faced by students both in the dominant culture and in non-dominant cultures, must be viewed from a long-term perspective. That is, change and development cannot be expected within a short period of time. However, investing resources in this development would not only enrich the lives of students and staff, but would also have the potential to be an important training ground for leaders who will lead a missional church in worship in an increasingly multicultural, globally-minded world. The value of such a program might not be recognized immediately, because the expectations of the dominant culture do not often align with a richly biblical view of the church. However, over time, with careful investment and effort, a program that partners with wider university programming and curriculum to equip students for such leadership would demonstrate its relevance, become a significant attraction for those who are considering worship leadership as a vocation, and allow the program to be a benchmark among worship leadership training experiences. Blimling and Whitt remind us:

Whether we conducted ten diversity programs this year pales in comparison to whether students who attended were effectively engaged in sharing, reflecting, and remaking their perspectives on diversity.¹⁴

Due to space limitations, this paper has not addressed all possible aspects of diversity. For example, more thought must be given to how chapel programming can adapt to the needs of part-time, commuter, or other non-traditional students. Also, more thought needs to be given to the impact of technology in the current generation, and the potential and dangers it

¹⁴ Blimling & Whitt, *Good Practice*, 41.

presents to congregational worship and public discipleship. Nevertheless, this paper has sought to offer some preliminary directions for widening the scope of its reflection on and leadership in issues of diversity in the Trinity Western University campus community. Clearly, it is important and strategic for chapel (along with other spiritual formation ministries) to develop a greater sensitivity to the many different backgrounds that students bring into their educational and spiritual experience at university, and to provide venues for them to reflect on and reform those notions of the world to be more adequate for the complex world in which we live.

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