



# CULTURE ETHNICITY DIVERSITY



**L**eaders



Version 1.4

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# Culture, Ethnicity and Diversity

## *Introduction to the Course*



### Development Associates International

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## Course Description

Who are you? The concept of identity and its relationship to self, group, organization and culture is one of the most powerful forces leaders confront today. We see ourselves and are seen by others in a range of dynamic identities: age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, etc. Identity can change over historical periods, across cultures, and through a life cycle. Managing the tensions between identity and identification is a complex and often unconscious negotiation that leaders must embrace if they are to succeed in multicultural settings and global environment. How do identities take on “currency” that either empowers or excludes? An adept leader in today’s world needs knowledge, experience and skills to facilitate work. But a world-class leader understands unconscious forces that impede work and can deploy strategies to transform them. This module helps to understand these dynamics and offers ways to build understanding and cooperation across cultural or other boundaries.

## Learning Objectives:

- Distinguish the complex issues related to culture and ethnic identity – issues like history, sociology, and more.
- Define terms like ethnicity, ethnocentricity, and culture that will be used throughout this course.
- Review five tragedies in recent history that have been influenced by the topic of ethnicity and diversity, especially the of intolerance of people who are different, “the Other.”
- Prepare to enter the process of asking where diversity-training fits in your overall training of others in Christian leadership as well as in your own lifestyle and obedience to Jesus’ Great Commission

## Module Units:

- Unit 1: Introducing Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity
- Unit 2: Creation and Fall
- Unit 3: And God Created Diversity
- Unit 4: Aliens and Strangers
- Unit 5: Blessed to Bless All Nations
- Unit 6: What Do We Do With the Past?
- Unit 7: Reaching Out to the “Other”
- Unit 8: The Church after Pentecost
- Unit 9: A Church for All Peoples
- Unit 10: Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- Unit 11: One New Humanity
- Unit 12: Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity in the Future
- Unit 13: Intentionality

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**Course Information*****Overview***

This course in “Culture, Ethnicity and Diversity” is one of several courses leading to a Masters degree on Organizational Leadership and Management. This course engages the student with issues related to identity, inter-personal cross-cultural relationships, and creating room for diversity in our communities, workplaces, and churches. It challenges the reader to look at others and give them the value assigned as God’s children, created in His image, and loved by Him. It also challenges the student to evaluate his/her own foundation for personal identity – with the goal being that we would all find our security in our internal identity in Christ.

**Course Structure**

This course is made up of thirteen units. These are designed so that normally a person will need 12 – 15 weeks to complete the readings and carry out the tasks. It involves thoughtful engagement with the written materials, responding to tasks that accompany the texts, and the completion of assignments to be sent to the professor.

**Expectations for the Course**

In the overall course curriculum leading to the Masters degree in Organizational Leadership and Management, this one may be the most theological because it assumes that human relationships work best when we’re all operating with an

understanding that we need to see others in the way that God sees us. The course makes use of many biblical texts because these are the best resources for applying God's views of equality across cultures.

In addition, this course may be one of the most personally challenging because it will confront our own sinful tendency to find our identity at the expense of another. Such confrontation will require change in our views of others and our behaviors towards them.

### **Note on method:**

How do you make yourself interact in a serious way with what you read? Here is a suggestion that may help, not only in your reading but also in preparing your assignments. In this course, whenever you read something that is new to you, mark the passage or idea in some special way, perhaps with an exclamation mark (!) in the margin next to the text. And whenever you read something you initially disagree with, mark that passage or idea in a different way, perhaps with a question mark (?) in the margin. This will leave a visible trail for you to follow in identifying what you are learning and in what you may want to return to for further analysis and study.

### **Note on process:**

In each unit there are interactive tasks, usually marked by subtitles like: "For your reflection," and "Think about this." These indicators request you to stop further reading and bring your own experience and analysis to bear on the issue being discussed. Because cultural and ethnic realities are inherently relational, try to complete your personal work on each unit and then discuss the results of your interactive tasks in a group with two other people.

Ideally, this group should be someone from outside your own racial, ethnic, or cultural group. Share your thinking with them and ask for their feedback: agreement, disagreement, or additional ideas. We often learn most about our culture by listening to observers who view us from outside ourselves. If possible, this group will be composed of one other cohort member of your course as well as one person who is not taking the course.

When you send in your assignments to your professor you will be asked to confirm that you have indeed completed this part of the process for each of the units, not only for the three units for which you do formal assignments.

Our hope is that this course will be useful to you as you grow in your own understanding of your identity in Christ so that you can be an agent of positive transformation in relationships in your organization and community. We pray that what you do with what you learn will be used of God to foster reconciliation between Christians as together our lives are progressively transformed.

And we pray that it may be helpful to you personally as you face the relational challenges of living a life of integrity in a culturally diverse world as a faithful follower of Jesus and as a leader of his people.



### **About the author**

Paul Borthwick serves with Development Associates International focusing on leadership development in the Majority World. As such, he spends two or more months every year in overseas ministry. In addition, he teaches missions at Gordon College, serves as an Urbana/Missions Associate with InterVarsity Christian

Fellowship, and mobilizes others for cross-cultural missions. Rick Warren, author of *Purpose-Driven Life* cites Paul's books *A Mind for Missions* and *How to be a World-Class Christian* as "books that should be read by every Christian." He has authored 15 books.

Paul Borthwick has a D.Min. in Cross-Cultural Ministry as well as a M.Div. degree from Gordon-Conwell Seminary. His bachelor's work was in Business Administration from University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

### **Some Personal Convictions**

1. At the core of our discipleship as followers of Jesus Christ is the matter of identity. Our salvation through Jesus Christ is not merely for eternal purposes but also to give a sense of security in being loved, accepted, forgiven, and incorporated into the family of God. As we grow in our relationship with Him and in relationship with each other, we will progressively find a sense of internal identity that relies more on Him and less on external matters like culture, social status, or comparison to others.

2. Christians can celebrate our cultural and ethnic identity because we are created in the image of God. But – in light of what God has done on the Cross through Jesus Christ – these identities become secondary. Our primary identity is now "in Christ." As a result, salvation carries with it implications for relationships that are both horizontal and vertical. On the vertical dimension, we are reconciled to God through Christ, but on the horizontal dimension, we also are reconciled into God's global, cross-cultural family. If I become a son or daughter of God through Jesus, then suddenly I am brother or sister to people from many cultures different than my own.

3. Thus applications related to this issue of ethnicity will have many local, contextual expressions, but the best place to start in addressing all peoples of any culture is God's teaching in the Bible. As a result, each unit will feature Bible study so that we understand the underlying principles that make reconciliation and cross-cultural relationships possible

4. With minds renewed by the Scriptures, Christians are in a position to make decisions and perform actions that faithfully accomplish God's will.

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# Culture, Ethnicity and Diversity

## Unit 1: Introduction to the Topic



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# Unit 1 – Introduction to the Topic

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### Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Identify the basic motivation for and direction of this course.
- Distinguish the complex issues related to culture and ethnic identity – issues like history, sociology, and more.
- Define terms like ethnicity, ethnocentricity, and culture that will be used throughout this course.
- Review five tragedies in recent history that have been influenced by the topic of ethnicity and diversity, especially the of intolerance of people who are different, “the Other.”
- Prepare to enter the process of asking where diversity-training fits in your overall training of others in Christian leadership as well as in your own lifestyle and obedience to Jesus’ Great Commission

## Module Plan

### **Unit 1: Course Introduction**

Unit 2: Creation and Fall

Unit 3: And God Created Diversity

Unit 4: Aliens and Strangers

Unit 5: Blessed to Bless All Nations

Unit 6: What Do We Do With the Past?

Unit 7: Reaching Out to the “Other”

Unit 8: The Church after Pentecost

Unit 9: A Church for All Peoples

Unit 10: Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Unit 11: One New Humanity

Unit 12: Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity in the Future

Unit 13: Intentionality

### **Steps to Complete Unit 1**

#### **Read and Respond**

Read the lecture notes in the workbook. There will be space to respond from time to time as you read the text. Please follow the instructions before continuing your reading.

Readings are included at the end of several Units. The readings include case studies, book chapters, and other documents. Please reflect and respond as indicated in assignments found within the texts.

**Supplementary required textbook:** George Yancey, Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility (InterVarsity Press, 2006).

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### Overview

This course in “Culture, Ethnicity and Diversity” is one of several courses leading to a Masters degree on Organizational Leadership and Management. This course engages the student with issues related to identity, inter-personal cross-cultural relationships, and creating room for diversity in our communities, workplaces, and churches. It challenges the reader to look at others and give them the value assigned as God’s children, created in His image, and loved by Him. It also challenges the student to evaluate his/her own foundation for personal identity – with the goal being that we would all find our security in our internal identity in Christ.

### Course Structure

This course is made up of thirteen units. These are designed so that normally a person will need 12 – 15 weeks to complete the readings and carry out the tasks. It involves thoughtful engagement with the written materials, responding to tasks that accompany the texts, and the completion of assignments to be sent to the professor

### Expectations for the Course

In the overall course curriculum leading to the Masters degree in Organizational Leadership and Management, this one may be the most theological because it assumes that human relationships work best when we’re all operating with an understanding that we need to see others in the way that God sees us. The course makes use of many biblical texts because these are the best resources for applying God’s views of equality across cultures.

In addition, this course may be one of the most personally challenging because it will confront our own sinful tendency to find our identity at the expense of another. Such confrontation will require change in our views of others and our behaviors towards them.

**Note on method:** How do you make yourself interact in a serious way with what you read? Here is a suggestion that may help, not only in your reading but also in preparing your assignments. In this course, whenever you read something that is new to you, mark the passage or idea in some special way, perhaps with an exclamation mark (!) in the margin next to the text. And whenever you read something you initially disagree with, mark that passage or idea in a different way, perhaps with a question mark (?) in the margin. This will leave a visible trail for you to follow in identifying what you are learning and in what you may want to return to for further analysis and study.

**Note on process:** In each unit there are interactive tasks, usually marked by subtitles like: “For your reflection,” and “Think about this.” These indicators request you to stop further reading and bring your own experience and analysis to bear on the issue being discussed. Because cultural and ethnic realities are inherently relational, try to complete your personal work on each unit and then discuss the results of your interactive tasks in a group with two other people.

Ideally, this group should be someone from outside your own racial, ethnic, or cultural group.

Share your thinking with them and ask for their feedback: agreement, disagreement, or additional ideas. We often learn most about our culture by listening to observers who view us from outside ourselves. If possible, this group will be composed of one other cohort member of your course as well as one person who is not taking the course.

When you send in your assignments to your professor you will be asked to confirm that you have indeed completed this part of the process for each of the units, not only for the three units for which you do formal assignments.

Our hope is that this course will be useful to you as you grow in your own understanding of your identity in Christ so that you can be an agent of positive transformation in relationships in your organization and community. We pray that what you do with what you learn will be used of God to foster reconciliation between Christians as together our lives are progressively transformed. And we pray that it may be helpful to you personally as you face the relational challenges of living a life of integrity in a culturally diverse world as a faithful follower of Jesus and as a leader of his people.

## Practical Exercise

Answer Box # 1

To begin this course, get together with one other person and introduce yourself. Ask each other the question: “**Who are you?**” Give as many identifying characteristics or traits of yourself as you can and get as many identifiers as possible from the other person. Write these traits or identifiers down and then discuss together – which of these traits are external (i.e. determined by your culture or context) and which of these are internal and unchanging?



learning

## Five Tragic Stories<sup>1</sup>

### ***RWANDA – When the nuns brought the gasoline***

On 22 April 1994, Séraphine Mukamana, a worker at a Christian orphanage, had hidden herself in a garage when militias attacked a convent in Sovu in southern Rwanda. Seraphine was from one of the ethnic groups battling each other in Rwanda, and the attacking soldiers were from the other. She testified later in court:

"We sought refuge in the garage and closed and barricaded the doors. Outside a bloodbath was going on.

Suddenly an orphan began to weep as it got too hot in the garage. At once, the killers approached the garage."

The refugees refused to come out, so the militia leader Emmanuel Rekeraho decided to burn them alive in the garage. The soldiers were uneasy because it was a Christian orphanage, but the leader remarked to his fellow soldiers, "The nuns are coming to help us. They are bringing gasoline." Two of the sisters from the convent, Sister Gertrude and Sister Kisito – members of the soldiers ethnic group - approached with petrol cans. They joined the militiamen in setting fire to the garage. Seraphine was badly burned, but she miraculously survived to tell her story.

The 1994 Rwandan genocide, killing an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus, is made even more incomprehensible by the documented participation of many representatives of Rwandan church societies. How could God fearing

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<sup>1</sup> Each story is true to a historical incident, though at times, the names and some details have been changed.

nuns, and even a bishop, take part in the most cruel crimes against humanity committed on African soil? Even worse, several church societies allegedly were co-responsible for the growing hatred that led to the genocide.

**Box # 2**

What went wrong?

***NORTHERN IRELAND – “You are not allowed to be friends”***

Patrick came from a devoted Roman Catholic family who went to Mass and confession every week, prayed regularly, and surrounded themselves with reminders of their Christian faith. Ian came from a similar family in another section of Belfast, Northern Ireland, but his family was Protestant. Like Patrick’s family, they went to church every week, read the Bible at the evening meal, and prayed and trusted Jesus to meet their needs and forgive their sins.

Patrick and Ian got to meet each other when their schools played football against each other. Though there were many tensions in Northern Ireland at the time, the headmasters of their respective schools hoped that playing sports could help build some peace in their city. For Patrick and Ian, it worked. They were both goal-tenders and captain of their teams. Their traditions meant that they led their teams in prayer before each new match.

After one of their first games, Patrick and Ian joined mid-field to shake hands, and they began to talk. They immediately sensed a comradery together, and they exchanged phone numbers. Two or three times per week they would talk and report on their various experiences in football matches. Soon the conversations got into other topics including their studies, their interest in girls, and even their faith. They soon found out that they had much in common.

When Patrick’s team was scheduled to come across town to play Ian’s, Ian wanted to invite Patrick over for tea after the game. On Monday, the day before the match, Ian explained his friendship with Patrick to his Mum and asked if he could come over on Tuesday evening. To Ian’s surprise, his mother was furious. She scolded him: “Is that boy from a Catholic school? And you have been friendly with him? Don’t you understand your heritage, boy? You’re Protestant and he is Catholic. No! He may not come over, and I forbid you from talking to him again. You are not allowed to be friends.”

**Box # 3**

What might be behind Ian’s mother’s comments?

**CROATIA: Sniping young men for Jesus**

In the city of Mostar in what is now Bosnia-Herzegovina, a river historically separated the Christians from the Moslems. Even though there was inter-religious and inter-ethnic tension in the city that dated back to 1389, the people had lived in relative peace under the forced unity of the Yugoslavian government for several decades. Commerce occasionally brought people together in functional relationships, but generally they lived separated lives.

After the break-up of Yugoslavia according to ethnic groups in 1989, the city became totally separated. Warring factions destroyed a strategic bridge that had brought the two sections of the city together. On the Christian side, a high hill gave the Christians a vantage point into the city streets of the Muslim side. Military members from the Christian side would climb the hill every day and focus their scopes on the city streets of the Muslim side. Expert marksmen sat daily in hopes of killing any Muslims that walked the streets in open areas, but their special interest was the young men. Men who prayed, read their Bibles, baptized their babies, and attended church were assassinating unarmed people with the thought that they were pleasing God.

Box # 3

*What went wrong with the way that the Christians viewed the Muslims?*

**SOUTH AFRICA: Beatings on Saturday; to church on Sunday**

Like most young men in South Africa during the Apartheid regime, Ivor was drafted to serve two years in the military. Ivor was registered “white” according to the Apartheid Laws, though he knew from his father that his grandfather had had a black wife – which helped Ivor understand his skin tone and hair texture. Like most South Africans, Ivor attended church every Sunday<sup>2</sup> And like many South African military, Ivor was commanded to search through the black townships each week looking for revolutionaries or members of the Africa National Congress (ANC) or other groups that the government had identified as subversive

During one week in 1985, Ivor was on a routine patrol in the black township of Soweto (near Johannesburg). He and his patrol heard shouting and pursued the cause. They came upon another military patrol who was angrily interrogating a family suspected of ANC ties. As members of the other patrol sought to forcibly detain two of the teenage boys in the family, the mother and the grandmother tried to intervene. Their cries were a mix of anguish and prayers. They pulled the boys shouting, “Help us Jesus, help us Jesus.” As they resisted the soldiers, they both met the force of the butt-end of a rifle.

The mother’s jaw was obviously broken; the grandmother was knocked unconscious. After the military vehicles left with the boys, Ivor went towards the women in an effort to help. His commanding officer rebuked him and told him to get back on patrol.

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<sup>2</sup> More than 60% of South Africans of all races attended Christian church services during the 1980’s.

The next day was Sunday, and Ivor was in his all-white church with his wife and his two boys. As he looked up at the picture of Jesus holding the lamb in his arms, he cried quietly: “How can I be beating people on Saturday who are crying out to Jesus, and then sitting here on Sunday?”

**Box # 4**

*How would you have counseled Ivor?*

**NIGERIA: “You are first a Yoruba man.”**

Yosuf’s father had converted to Christianity when Yosuf was only a child, so Yosuf had been raised as a Christian in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood in the large city of Lagos. When it came time to go to university, Yosuf wanted to pursue studies that were offered only at a school in the eastern part of his country, Nigeria.

He went to the city of Port Harcourt to study for four years. It was a difficult cultural adjustment because Yosuf didn’t speak Ibo, the language of the dominant ethnic group in the East. Yosuf was a Yoruba, the dominant ethnic group in the West. Nevertheless, the classes were in English, and Yosuf found fellowship in a local Christian student group which had students from many of Nigeria’s language groups. While he was there, he met Margaret, a strong Christian from a Christian family. Though she was an Ibo, they became close friends.

After graduation, they had grown very close, and they wanted to pursue marriage. Because Yosuf sensed that his father might be resistant to Margaret, Yosuf decided that he wanted to take Margaret to Lagos to meet his family before he approached her father for permission. Together they made the long journey to Lagos. Yosuf’s father and mother welcomed Margaret, but on the first night, Yosuf sensed that his father was upset.

Yosuf went to his father after Margaret had gone to sleep. “Father, what is wrong?” he asked. His father replied, “Yosuf, Margaret seems like a beautiful girl, and I know she is a Christian, but she is not one of us – a Yoruba! You must remember: you are first a Yoruba man. I do not want you to marry her.”

**Box # 5**

*Why would Yosuf’s father respond in this way? What should Yosuf do?*



## **Introduction**

All of these stories feature people dealing with fundamental questions related to this course:

- Who **AM** I?
- Who are you in relationship to me?
- And if we are from different cultures, backgrounds, ethnic groups, or other distinguishing identifiers, how do we relate?

Understanding the answers to these questions affects my relationship to myself, my group, my organization and my culture. It is one of the most powerful forces leaders confront today because it affects both how we see ourselves but also how we relate to others who are different.. We see ourselves and are seen by others in a range of dynamic identities: age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, etc.

Identity can change over historical periods, across cultures, and through our life cycle. Managing the tensions between identity and identification is a complex and often unconscious negotiation that leaders must embrace if they are to succeed in multicultural settings and the global environment. How do identities take on “currency” that either empowers or excludes – especially those whom we regard as “other” or “not our people”?

An adept leader in today’s world needs knowledge, experience and skills to facilitate work. But a world-class leader understands unconscious forces that separate people, impede work, and create destructive interpersonal breakdown. Effective leaders need to understand these dynamics so that they can deploy strategies to transform them.

*This course is designed to get you to wrestle with these issues from a biblically perspective with practical applications in daily relationships.* This module gets us started in identifying the issues, understanding terms that we will use, and understand these dynamics necessary to build understanding and cooperation across cultural or other boundaries.

## **WHICH CHARACTER ARE YOU?**

Three biblical characters help us understand the contrasting way that God’s people have related to those who are “Other.”<sup>3</sup> These three will appear throughout the course, but start the process of this course by asking which of these people you are most like.

*Are you like Jonah?* When Jonah was called upon to reach out to people outside of his own cultural group, he ran the other way. His historic bitterness for these people combined with his fear that God might be merciful towards them forced him to run away. Eventually he came back, but not willingly. And when God exercised his mercy towards those Jonah hated, Jonah got depressed. Are there people that you hate because of history? Are there other religious groups that you would not want God to be merciful towards? Then maybe you’re starting this course like Jonah. Watch out! God may have to do some incredible things to get your attention.

*Or are you like Peter?* Peter’s first identity was in his Jewishness. He believed in Jesus, but mostly as Savior of the Jews, not as Savior of the world. Like Jonah, Peter probably had some of the same bitterness issues towards outsiders, but he mostly

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<sup>3</sup> See the definition of terms.

ignored the Gentiles (non-Jews). That is, until God called Peter to go and eat a meal with them. After God's persistent persuasion, Peter went (see Unit 9), but he still preferred separateness. To Peter, there was still a "them and us" distinction – even in the church. Do you prefer to have Christian friends who are all from your same group – ethnic, cultural, social, or economic? Do you see your group as the "us" and those whose skin color or level in society is different than you as "them"? If so, then maybe you're like Peter. Don't be surprised if you're eating a meal with some surprising people by the end of this course.

*Or are you like Paul?* From his pre-Christian life as a radical Jew, Paul's vision of other people was transformed by his understanding of the way that Christ's death on the cross broke down the walls that divide people. He served on a multi-cultural, multi-racial team. He recruited Jews and Gentiles to work together, and he dedicated his life to helping Christians understand that Jesus sacrifice makes us into a culture of equals, a "new humanity" (see Unit 11). Are you like Paul – desiring that your church or fellowship realizes that in Christ we are "one"? Then this course will help you understand more fully from the Bible why Paul's view is the one we want to pursue.

### Think about it

#### Answer Box # 6

*The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance.* (Eugene Peterson, Ephesians 2 in The Message)

As you begin this course, reflect on what you think this verse means for you in your network of relationships, in your church or in your society-at-large. Specifically:

- What walls do you see in your community that people erect based on their cultural or ethnic differences in order to keep people "at a distance?"
- What other forces – in addition to culture and ethnicity – keep people at a difference from each other?



### learning

## BEFORE GOING MUCH FURTHER – SOME DEFINITIONS

Our course will make use of Bible study, the research of others, and relevant, self-searching case studies to help us wrestle with these topics. As we start our learning, however, we should agree on some terms that will appear throughout the course.

**Culture:** The Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization defines culture as “an integrated system of **beliefs** (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of **customs** (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.), and of **institutions** which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.), **which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.**<sup>4</sup>

**Ethnicity:** Hutchinson and Smith (Oxford) identify six points or variables that give definition to an ethnic group:

- 1) Common proper name
  - a. Based on language or nationality
  - b. There may be room for many subsets within the larger name
  - c. Ethnicity may fluctuate over time
- 2) An overarching story of a common ancestry, a story that may be true, myth or a combination. Being marginalized by the majority culture often defines one’s ethnicity. It can also produce identification with a larger group. Example: a Kikuyu may identify with her tribe in Kenya, but may only refer to herself as a Kenyan or an African if she is in Europe or North America
- 3) Shared historical memories – especially of an “oppositional” nature; i.e., defining ourselves against our historical opponents. Example: Jews use a word – *goyim* – to describe all of the world that’s not Jewish.
- 4) Common culture, including language and other traditions
- 5) A link with some identifiable homeland
- 6) Sense of solidarity with others from the same group, including loyalty and often solidarity in suffering.<sup>5 6</sup>

**Ethnocentricity** – ethnocentricity is the exaggeration of ethnic identity that affirms that one’s own ethnicity is not only unique but is actually superior to the culture and ethnicity of others. Sharp defines ethnocentricism as “the unassailable belief that one’s own ethnic group is superior to all others”<sup>7</sup> He goes on to explain that the term was coined by William Graham Sumner (1840-1910)

<sup>4</sup> “Willowbank Report on Gospel & Culture”

[http://community.gospelcom.net/printable\\_template.jsp?show\\_print=no&backPageID=14322&tmpl\\_sakey=44904](http://community.gospelcom.net/printable_template.jsp?show_print=no&backPageID=14322&tmpl_sakey=44904)

<sup>5</sup> John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds. *Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Related to ethnicity: see also Sinisa Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity* (Sage Publishers, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Douglas R. Sharp, *No Partiality: the Idolatry of Race & the New Humanity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 163.

and he defined ethnocentricity as: “the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity and boasts itself superior and looks with contempt on others”<sup>8</sup>

**The “Other” or “Otherness.”** While sometimes used in theology to describe the difference between humanity and God (as in “God is ‘other’”), these terms are widely used in literature on the subject of ethnocentricity and the need for reconciliation between cultures. The “Other” simply refers to the person who is different, exotic, unique or distinct from my culture or ethnic group, but it often comes with a negative association that is demeaning or full of bitterness because of past historical animosity. For Miraslov Volf, a noted author on this subject,<sup>9</sup> his “other” is the Serbian forces who tried to commit genocide against his people, the Croatians, during the 1990’s.

**Particularity** – a term used to identify the unique characteristics of individuals, families, communities, or cultures. It is generally a positive term – as in “One of the things that makes our culture unique (i.e., our particularity) is our music.” Andrew Walls uses the term to help us understand that Jesus came for all people (universality), but he came as a Jewish man born in Bethlehem at a specific time in history (particularity).<sup>10</sup>

**Racism** – the use of race as the central criterion by which an individual or a group judges other people (James Tillman). “Racism or the presupposition that one’s own race is superior or better than another is a denial that all people have been created in the image of God”<sup>11</sup> If ethnocentricity is a cultural problem; racism is a biological one.<sup>12</sup>

*Racism note:* while race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably (and they may be used like this in this course), the word race has been often attributed to European colonial desires to distinguish people based on external characteristics (phenotypes) like skin color or facial characteristics. Race is most commonly used today to identify groups that have a sense of oppression at the hands of some dominant other group.

### **BACK ON COURSE**

Together over these next weeks we’re going to try to discover what it means to tear down ethnic and cultural barriers and work to see the creation and expression of “God’s new humanity” in Christ. But, as the case studies indicate, the issues are complex involving theology, history, as well as practical daily expressions like friendship and marriage. How can these complex,

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Sharp, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> Miraslov Volf’s book, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) is a recommend resource on the subject of overcoming the separation caused by excluding the “other.”

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Walls, Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture,” The Missions-Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Orbis, 2001), pp. 3-15.

<sup>11</sup> Hays, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> Sharp, p. 162.

multi-sided issues be addressed to create what one person calls “united diversity” in the “new household” that God is building through Christ?

As we pursue this topic we’ll wrestle together and in our own individual contexts with big questions that can transform us, our communities, and our societies.

- What does God want when it comes to ethnic diversity yet unity in the Christian community and the society at large?
- Where does ethnicity and ethnic identity fit into the profile of being a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- And where does ethnic identity go wrong and become destructive ethnocentrism?
- In short, what does it mean to be united in Christ (universality) yet diverse in culture (particularity)?

### Our Big Question

Before proceeding into the course let’s evaluate a question at the core of our pursuit together. Let’s agree that we believe that helping people follow Jesus and serving others as their leaders means affirming peoples’ ethnic identities, accepting our differing histories and learning from each other’s cultural uniqueness. Yet we know that we also need to combat the destructive tendencies of ethnocentrism (i.e., my identity or ethnicity expressed at your expense). This idea of **“my identity at your expense”** is at the core of the problem of separation between peoples. In a sense, we’re all like the Pharisee in Luke 18 who asserted “I thank you God that I am not like this tax-collector.” In our quest to establish our own identity, we often look for others to look down upon so that we feel important or superior. We might have different statements than the Pharisee. Our statements might be, “I thank you God that I am not...

- Like those poor people
- Like that lowly caste
- Like that other race or ethnic group
- Like that nationality.

We need to dedicate some hard work to assess and address this issue clearly. On the one hand we do want to affirm the God-given distinctions of ethnic and cultural identity. On the other hand, Jesus makes us “one” so we need to rebuke ethnocentrism and the human tendency to assert superiority over others.

#### Answer Box # 7

*The BIG question: celebrating uniqueness, affirming unity.*

*Your pastor has just started reading this course with you. In a private conversation, he asks you the BIG question:*

*How do we build a body of believers where all can celebrate our sense of ethnicity – “Who I am” – yet defeat the exclusivistic tendency towards ethnocentrism – “Who I am not” [or “who I am at the expense of another”]?*

*What are your first thoughts as you start the course?*



**learning**

The underlying investigation of this course will confront the issues of:

- 1) **IDENTITY:** What does it mean to be ‘in Christ’ and part of the ‘new community’ in relationship to our God-created ethnic diversity and cultural particularity?
- 2) **FORGIVENESS:** How do we reconcile people who are historically divided and who have been culturally conditioned to hate each other? What does the “new community” mean – given multiple offenses caused by “others”? Or, to put it in a New Testament analogy, how does the church in Jerusalem welcome people like Paul the apostle (given his violent actions against them) or peoples like the Samaritans (given the historical Jewish-Samaritan animosity)?
- 3) **RECONCILIATION:** How do we move believers from an individualistic model of conversion, which focuses on the vertical relationship, to a more biblical model of conversion, which features reconciliation vertically to God through Christ and horizontally to each other through Christ because Christ has destroyed the dividing walls of hostility?
- 4) **LIVING IT OUT:** On a practical level of the local church or an organization, what does becoming a “new household” (Ephesians 2) look like? And how can I, as a leader, model Christlike behavior and create an environment where God’s design for multi-cultural acceptance and unity gets expressed?

### Underlying issues

Our investigation of this question of ethnicity versus ethnocentrism issue tackles a wide spectrum. **First, the question relates to history.** As Jonah illustrates, ethnic division is not new and often addresses ethnic divides that have been festering for generations. This might include wrestling with longstanding historical animosity between separated or warring peoples. It will definitely require that we wrestle with bitterness that might exist because one group mistreated another dozens or hundreds of years ago. It can mean investigating back into the interaction of Christian and missions history (and the accompanying colonial history) that will force us to address some very uncomfortable realities regarding the ways that Christians of past generations reinforced racial stereotypes and implicitly endorsed ethnocentricity.

*“The only way this [reconciliation] is remotely possible is when we tell each other the truth about that past. If there is no truth, there can never be repentance.”<sup>13</sup>*

**Historical example:** Kwame Bediako of Ghana points out that the primary exposure of Europeans to Africans before 1800 was in the context of slavery: “Together with theories of racial hierarchy and a chain of being elaborated to explain social, cultural, and economic diversities between the different groupings of mankind perceived as races, this image insured that ‘consistently the Negro was relegated to the bottom of the scale’<sup>14</sup>

Bediako goes on to show that missionaries coming from Europe, no matter how benevolent they were, often came with the same attitudes; some of the missionaries treated Africa and Africans as “savage, ignorant, and superstitious.”<sup>15</sup> If we are to

<sup>13</sup> The Finest Robe, the Essential Vision: Reconciliation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the 2002 compendium of the “Brandywine Forum”. St. Davids, PA: The Institute for Global Engagement and Eastern University, 2002, (p. 11).

<sup>14</sup> Kwame Bediako, Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 6

<sup>15</sup> Bediako, Christianity in Africa, p. 6.

address this topic honestly, we will need to confront the fact that many of the Christian “heroes” of the so-called ‘Great Century’ (the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) in the global expansion of the church probably held views of indigenous peoples that today we would consider pejorative at best and at worst, racist.

**A note from the author of this course.** Writing as an American of European descent, I know that I cannot escape my own country’s history of slavery. In addition, the colonialist’s oppression of our own indigenous peoples – the so-called “Indians,” now called “Native Americans” or “First Nation Peoples” – has helped shape the American struggle with inter-racial and inter-ethnic relationships. I might want to excuse myself and state, “Yes, but all that happened before my ancestors even moved here,” but I must accept the fact that this history has shaped the world that I now live in. Unit 6 will be devoted exclusively to this issue of dealing with the historical past and how it has shaped our cultures and ethnic identities.

### Answer Box # 8

*Think of where you live: how important is history in shaping inter-cultural or inter ethnic relationships in your context?*



### learning

**Second, the question relates to all of our systems of human relationships (anthropology and sociology).** As we wrestle with how we view ourselves and how we define ourselves as against the “other,” we’re addressing a topic that will transform both the way we see ourselves and the way we view others. As a result, the biblical studies in our course will force us to consider inter-personal relationships in the Body of Christ that are truly counter-cultural. The “new humanity” of the Church will set it apart from a world of cultures defined by separation and hostility towards each other. This question is especially important for Christian leaders working in contexts where Christianity is a minority religion because the view of the “Other” is shaped by the ways that other religious worldviews (Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, Secularist, etc) have related to and at times oppressed Christians.

**Third, the question relates to the Christian understanding of salvation (soteriology) as well as the Christian practice of outreach (missiology).** Does “accepting Jesus” mean also accepting the ‘other’ whom Jesus loves? Is a person with

the racial hatred of someone like Jonah showing that he or she has not truly understood the grace of God in his/her own life? Cross-cultural workers have gone ahead of us believing that God loved the “others” that they were trying to reach, but did they communicate that becoming part of Christ’s family required them to change the way that they viewed “others” – especially their historical enemies? Did they teach people to look upward to Christ for salvation without teaching them to look sideways to realize that being reconciled to God means being reconciled to others?

**Fourth, the question relates to the church (ecclesiology) and to the biblical concept of the “bringing in Kingdom of God” (eschatology).** What is God’s desired plan for cross-cultural human relationships? In other words, how much of this diversity should be happening now (already) and how much will not occur until heaven? Is God’s heavenly goal that everybody be the same with no cultural distinction (what experts call “homogeneity”)? No one really believes that, but if heaven is a place where cultural distinction (particularity) somehow exist in unity, how does this get reproduced in Christians in this present world we live in? Daniel Hays writes, “We in the Church today need to ask ourselves the question as to why our earthly churches differ so much in composition from the congregations depicted in Revelation?”<sup>16</sup>

**Finally, the question relates to our understanding of God (theology).** How does being created in the image of God affect the way we view ourselves and others? What is the impact of sin in the world and on relationships? How are our conclusions affected when we consider God’s desire for the nations, the reconciling work of Christ, and the multi-cultural vision of heaven?

The theological exploration requires that we wrestle with the biblically supported tension of being “one in Christ” (John 17; Ephesians 2) versus celebrating our diversity (Acts 15; Revelation 5:9; 7:9).

In the development of leaders, we’re looking at personal and community transformation. Our theological foundation establishes the biblical teaching on how a disciple of Jesus Christ needs to be transformed in his/her view of self and others. Thus, the heart of this course will emphasize theological foundations, and as a result, biblical stories and teaching will serve as a primary “text.”

### **A note on the limitations of this course**

It is naïve to think that a brief course can answer every question or solve every problem related to the complex issues of ethnicity and culture. We will evaluate political case studies, but this is not a course in political science nor in inter-ethnic public policy. We will discuss issues related to identity, but this is not first and foremost a course on identity formation.

What this course aims to do is to awaken the participant to questions, theological issues, and inter-personal matters that are essential to Christian leadership in a multi-cultural world. The focus will be on Christian approaches to the issues, and we will try to learn from both positive examples where the Church truly shined as “light in the midst of darkness”, and we will confront the areas where the church failed by succumbing to cultural or societal pressures.

More than anything else, we hope that this course will take the participant in new directions in understanding why we need better training on how to view and treat people who are different from ourselves. And we hope that upon completing this course,

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<sup>16</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 199.



each participant will have some concrete action steps so that together we can grow to express in our churches, organizations, and communities the “new humanity” created by the reconciling death of Christ on the Cross.

### Optional Case Studies to consider:

- RWANDA - [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_rwanda.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_rwanda.html)
- BOSNIA - [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_bosnia.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_bosnia.html)
- KOSOVO - [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_kosovo.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_kosovo.html)
- SREBENICA - [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_srebrenica.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_srebrenica.html)
- KASHMIR - [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_kashmir\\_punjab.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_kashmir_punjab.html)
- ARMENIA - [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_armenia.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_armenia.html)
- COMPARING NIGERIA/SOUTH AFRICA  
[http://www.beyondintractability.org/case\\_studies/nigeria\\_south-africa.jsp?nid=6720](http://www.beyondintractability.org/case_studies/nigeria_south-africa.jsp?nid=6720)



Answer Box # 9

#### **FURTHER REFLECTION:**

- 1) A book recently was published entitled ***War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning***. What do you think such a title might mean? Read reviews of this book at
  - a. <http://flakmag.com/books/warisaforce.html> or
  - b. [http://www.tpc.org/review/review.cfm?review\\_id=110](http://www.tpc.org/review/review.cfm?review_id=110)
  
- 2) Read Psalm 92. What role did the defeating of enemies have in the formation of the individual and collective identity of the people of Israel? How does this compare with Jesus' view of enemies in Matthew 5:38-48?

## Final Assignment



### Final Assignment

**1) Biblical reflection:** as this course begins, reflect on these passages. Write a short letter to one of your children or to a niece or nephew (preferably someone under the age of 15 years old) explaining what these verses mean as they are applied to the modern culture in which we live.

- *John 17: 20-23* – explain what it means for disciples to be “one”
- *Galatians 3:26-28* – explain what the differences between people (race, ethnicity, gender, economics) means in terms of Christian relationships.

**2) Personal/local reflection:** Write an analysis of the cultural context in which you live – both the wider culture and the Church. Identify

- Examples of healthy unity in diversity (Marriages? Job partnerships? Shared church leaderships?)
- Examples of potential racial, ethnic, and cultural tensions (look for active things (editorials of one group against another; politicians seeking to appease one group at the expense of another) as well as things that appear more passive (humor, jokes, proverbs that belittle a different ethnic group; churches separated by ethnic identity, etc.)
- Examples of where the church has differed from the culture in dealing with issues related to ethnicity or ethnocentricity.

## Readings:

- Read Andrew Walls article “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture”
  - Make sure to understand the idea of particularity and universality as it relates to the mission of Jesus.
- Read George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2006): please read the introduction and review the Table of Contents.



## Answer Box # 10

*How important is ethnic identity in your family? In your church? In your community?*

**learning**

We thank the Publishers for granting us permission to integrate the respective chapters of the books in this DAI workbook.

The following reading is taken from Andrew Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture: Is There a Historic Christian Faith?" *The Missions-Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Orbis, 2001), pp. 3-15, reprinted for limited classroom use by permission of the Publishers.

### ***The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture: Is There a "Historic Christian Faith?"<sup>17</sup>***

By Andrew Walls

Let us imagine a long-living, scholarly space visitor—a Professor of Comparative Inter-Planetary Religions perhaps—who is able to get periodic space-grants which enable him to visit Earth for field study every few centuries. Let us further assume that he wishes to pursue the study of the earth-religion Christianity on principles of Baconian induction, observing the practices, habits, and concerns of a representative sample of Christians, and that he exploits the advantage he has over any earthbound scholar by taking his sample across the centuries.

Let us assume his first visit to be to a group of the original Jerusalem Christians, about 37 CE. He notes that they are all Jews; indeed, they are meeting in the Temple, where only Jews can enter. They offer animal sacrifices. They keep the seventh day punctiliously free from work. They circumcise their male children. They carefully follow a succession of rituals, and delight in the reading of old law books. They appear, in fact, to be one of several "denominations" of Judaism. What distinguishes them from the others is simply that they identify the

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<sup>17</sup> This article was first published in *Faith and Thought* 108 (Nos. 1 and 2, 1982): 39-52. A slightly revised form appeared in *Missionalia* 10 (No. 3, 1982).

figures of Messiah, Son of Man, and Suffering Servant (figures all described in those law books) with the recent prophet-teacher Jesus of Nazareth, whom they believe to have inaugurated the last days. They live normal family lives, with a penchant for large, close families; and they have a tightly knit social organization, with many common meals taken in each other's houses. Law and joyful observance strike our spaceman observer as key notes of the religion of these early Christians.

His next visit to Earth is made about 325 CE. He attends a great meeting of Church leaders—perhaps even the Council of Nicea. The company come from all over the Mediterranean world and beyond it, but hardly one of them is Jewish; indeed on the whole they are rather hostile to Jews. They are horrified at the thought of animal sacrifices; when they talk about offering sacrifices they mean bread and wine used rather as it was in the house meals our observer noticed in Jerusalem. They do not have children themselves, since Church leaders are not expected to marry, and indeed most of them regard marriage as an inferior, morally compromised state; but they would regard a parent who circumcised his children as having betrayed his faith. They treat the seventh day as an ordinary working day: they have special religious observances on the first day, but do not necessarily abstain from work or other activities. They use the law books that the Jerusalem Christians used, in translation, and thus know the titles Messiah, Son of Man, and Suffering Servant; but "Messiah" has now become almost the surname of Jesus, and the other titles are hardly used at all. They give equal value to another set of writings, not even composed when the Jerusalem Christians met, and tend to use other titles, "Son of God," "Lord," to designate Jesus.

Their present preoccupation, however, is with the application of another set of words to Jesus—words not to be found in either set of writings. The debate (and they believe it of absolutely fundamental importance) is over whether the Son is *homo-ousios* with the Father, or only *homoi-ousios* with Him.

The dominant factors which the outsider notices as characteristic of these Christians are the concern with metaphysics and theology, an intense intellectual scrutiny, an attempt to find precise significance for precise terms. He thinks of the Jewish Christians in the Temple nearly three centuries back, and wonders. .

The best cure for his wonderment is the still greater wonder of a journey: to Ireland some three centuries later still.

A number of monks are gathered on a rocky coastline. Several are standing in ice-cold water up to their necks, reciting the psalms. Some are standing immobile, praying—with their arms outstretched in the form of a cross. One is receiving six strokes of the lash because he did not answer "Amen" when the grace was said at the last meal of brown bread and dulse. Others are going off in a small boat in doubtful weather with a box of beautiful manuscripts and not much else to distribute themselves on islands in the Firth of Clyde, calling the astonished inhabitants to give up their worship of nature divinities and seek for joy in a future heavenly kingdom. Others are sitting quite alone in dark caves by the seashore, seeking no intercourse with men.

He ascertains from these curious beings that their beautiful manuscripts include versions of the same holy writings that the Greek fathers used. He notices that the Irish use the same formula that he heard being hammered out in Nicea in 325 CE; somewhat to his surprise, because they do not in general seem very interested in theology or very good at metaphysics. They attach great importance to the date on which they celebrate their main festival, Easter; an outsider is most likely to notice their desire for holiness and their heroic austerity in quest of it.

Our spaceman delays his next visit until the 1840s, when he comes to London and finds in Exeter Hall a large and visibly excited assembly hearing speeches about the desirability of promoting Christianity, commerce, and civilization in Africa. They are proposing that missionaries armed with Bibles and cotton seeds be sent a distance of four thousand miles to affect the process. They are also proposing a deputation to the British Government about the necessity of putting down the slave trade, raising a subscription to promote the education of Black mechanics, agreeing that letters be written, pamphlets and articles published. The meeting has begun with a reading from the same book (in English translation) that the other Christians used, and there have been many other quotations from the book; indeed, a large number of people in the meeting seem to be carrying it. On enquiry, the observer finds that most also accept without question the creed of Nicea. Like the Irish, they also use the word "holy" quite a lot; but they are aghast at the suggestion that holiness could be connected with standing in cold water, and utterly opposed to the idea of spending life praying in an isolated cave. Whereas the Irish monks were seeking to live on as little as possible, most of this group look remarkably well fed. What impresses the outsider is their activism and the involvement of their religion in all processes of life and society.

In 1980 he comes to earth again, this time to Lagos, Nigeria. A white-robed group is dancing and chanting through the streets on their way to their church. They are informing the world at large that they are Cherubim and Seraphim; they are inviting people to come and experience the power of God in their services. They claim that God has messages for particular individuals and that his power can be demonstrated in healing. They carry and quote from the same book as the Exeter Hall gentlemen. They say (on being shown the document in a prayer book) that they accept the creed of Nicea, but they display little interest in it: they appear somewhat vague about the relationship of the Divine Son and the Holy Spirit. They are not politically active and the way of life pursued by the Exeter Hall gentlemen is quite foreign to them; they fast like the Irish, but only on fixed occasions and for fixed purposes. The characteristic which springs most readily to the spaceman's mind is their concern with power, as revealed in preaching, healing, and personal vision.

Back in his planetary home, how does our scholar correlate the phenomena he has observed? It is not simply that these five groups of humans, all claiming to be Christians, appear to be concerned about different things; the concerns of one group appear suspect or even repellent to another.

Now in no case has he chosen freakish examples of Christians. He has gone to groups which may, as far as such statements can be permissible at all, be said to reflect representative concerns of Christians of those times and places, and in each case the place is in the Christian heart that period. In 37 CE most Christians were Jews. Not only was Jerusalem the Christian center; Jerusalem Christians laid down the norms and standards for other people. By 325 CE few Christians were Jews, the main Christian centers lay in the European Mediterranean and the key Language for Christians was Greek. By 600 CL, the balance had shifted westward, and the growing edge of Christianity was among the northern and western tribal and semi-tribal peoples—and Ireland was a power center. In the 1840s, Great Britain would certainly be among the outstanding Christian nations, and certainly the one most notably associated with the expansion of the Christian faith. By 1980, the balance had shifted again southwards Africa is now the continent most notable for those that profess and call themselves Christians.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See David B. Barrett, "A.D. 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa," *International Review of Mission* 59 (1970): 39-54; A.F. Walls, "Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History," in J.S. Pobee, ed., *Religion in a Pluralistic Society: Essays Presented to Professor C.G. Beta* (Leaden, 1976), pp. 180-189.

So will our visitor conclude that there is no coherence? That the use of the name Christian by such diverse groups is fortuitous, or at least misleading? Or does he catch among the spheres some trace of Gilbert Murray's remark that representative Christians of the third, thirteenth, and twentieth centuries would have less in common than would a Catholic, Methodist, and Free-thinker, or even (glancing round the College Common Room and noting the presence of Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan) "a well-educated Buddhist or Brahmin at the present day?" Is shared religion in the end simply a function of shared culture?<sup>19</sup>

Our spaceman may, however, note that between the five groups he has visited there is a historical connection. It was Christians scattered from Jerusalem who first preached to Greeks and founded that vast Greek edifice he observed in 325; it is in Eastern Christianity that we must seek some of the important features and some of the power of Celtic Christian religion. That Celtic religion played a vital part in the gradual emergence of the religion of Exeter Hall. And the Cherubim and Seraphim now in Lagos are ultimately a result of the very sort of operations which were under discussion at the Exeter Hall meeting.

But besides this historical connection, closer examination reveals that there are other definite signs of continuity. There is, in all the wild profusion of the varying statements of these differing groups, one theme which is as, unvarying as the language which expresses it is various; that the person of Jesus is called the Christ has ultimate significance. In the institutional sphere, too, all use the same sacred writings; and all use bread and wine and water in a special way. Still more remarkable is the continuity of consciousness. Each group thinks of itself as having some community with the others, so different in time and place, and despite being so obviously out of sympathy with many of their principal concerns. Still more remarkable, each thinks of itself as in some respect continuous with ancient Israel, even though only the first have any conceivable ethnic reason to do so, and though some of the groups must have found it extremely hard to form any concept of ancient Israel, or any clear idea of what a Jew might be or look like.

Our observer is therefore led to recognize an essential continuity in Christianity: continuity of thought about the final significance of Jesus, continuity of a certain consciousness about history, continuity in the use of the Scriptures, of bread and wine, of water. But he recognizes that these continuities are cloaked with such heavy veils belonging to their environment that Christians of different times and places must often be unrecognizable to others, or indeed even to themselves, as manifestations of a single phenomenon.

### **The "Indigenizing Principle"**

Church history has always been a battleground for two opposing tendencies; and the reason is that each of the tendencies has its origin in the Gospel itself. On the one hand it is of the essence of the Gospel that God accepts us as we are, on the ground of Christ's work alone, not on the ground of what we have become or are trying to become. But, if He accepts us "as we are" that implies He does not take us as isolated, self-governing units, because we are not. We are conditioned by a particular time and place, by our family and group and society, by "culture" in fact. In Christ God accepts us together with our group relations; with that cultural conditioning that makes us feel at home in one part of human society and less at home in another. But if He takes us with our group relations, then surely it follows that He takes us with

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<sup>19</sup> Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (1935), p. 174

our "disrelations" also; those predispositions, prejudices, suspicions, and hostilities, whether justified or not, which mark the group to which we belong. He does not wait to tidy up our ideas any more than He waits to tidy up our behavior before He accepts us sinners into His family.

The impossibility of separating an individual from his social relationships and thus from his society leads to one unvarying feature in Christian history: the desire to "indigenize," to live as a Christian and yet as a member of one's own society, to make the Church (to use the memorable title of a book written in 1967 by F.B. Welbourn and B.A. Ogot about Independent churches in Africa) *A Place to Feel at Home*.

This fact has led to more than one crisis in Christian history, including the first and most important of all. When the elders at Jerusalem in the council of Acts 15 came to their decision that Gentiles could enter Israel without becoming Jews, had they any idea how close the time would be when most Christians would be Gentiles? And would they have been so happy with their decision had they realized it? Throughout the early years the Jerusalem Church was in a position to set the standards and to make the decisions, because of its direct connection with the Savior, and its incomparably greater knowledge of the Scriptures. And when its historic decision opened the door wide for Gentile believers in the Jewish Messiah, there must have been many who assumed that nevertheless Gentile Christians, as they matured, would come to look as much like Jerusalem Christians as was possible for such benighted heathen. At least Acts 21:20 suggests that, while being decently glad of the "mission field" conversions recounted by Paul, they continued to think of Jerusalem as the regulative center of God's saving word. What were the thoughts of those who fled from Jerusalem as the Roman armies moved in to cast down the Temple? Did they realize that the future of Messiah's proclamation now lay with people who were uncircumcised, defective in their knowledge of Law and Prophets, still confused by hangovers from paganism, and able to eat pork without turning a hair? Yet this—and the fact that there were still many left to speak of Jesus as Messiah—was the direct result of the decision of the Jerusalem Council to allow Gentile converts "a place to feel at home." So also was the acceptance of Paul's emphatic teaching that since God accepts the heathen as they are, circumcision, food avoidances, and ritual washings are not for them. Christ has so made Himself at home in Corinthian society that a pagan is consecrated through his or her Christian marriage partner (1 Cor. 7:14). No group of Christians has therefore any right to impose in the name of Christ upon another group of Christians a set of assumptions about life determined by another time and place.

The fact, then, that "if any man is in Christ he is a new creation" does not mean that he starts or continues his life in a vacuum, or that his mind is a blank table. It has been formed by his own culture and history, *and* since God has accepted him as he is, his Christian mind will continue to be influenced by what was in it before.—And this is as true for groups as for persons. All churches are culture churches—including our own.

### **The "Pilgrim" Principle**

But throughout Church history there has been another force in tension with this indigenizing principle, and this also is equally of the Gospel. Not only does God in Christ take people as they are: He takes them in order to transform them into what He wants them to be. Along with the indigenizing principle which makes his faith a place to reel at home, the Christian inherits the pilgrim principle, which whispers **to** him that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society; for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system. Jesus within Jewish culture,

Paul within Hellenistic culture, take it for granted that there will be rubs and frictions—not from the adoption of a new culture, but from the transformation of the mind towards that of Christ.

Just as the indigenizing principle, itself rooted in the Gospel, associates Christians with the *particulars* of their culture and group the pilgrim principle, in tension with the indigenizing and equally of the Gospel, by associating them with things and people outside the culture and group, is in some respects a *universalizing* factor. The Christian has all the relationships in which he was brought up, and has them sanctified by Christ who is living in them. But he has also an entirely new set of relationships, with other members of the family of faith into which he has come, and whom he must accept, with all their group relations (and "disrelations") on them, just as God has accepted him with his. Every Christian has dual nationality, and has a loyalty to the faith family which links him to those in interest groups opposed to that to which he belongs by nature.

In addition—as we observed to be the case in all the spaceman's varied groups of representative Christians—the Christian is given an adoptive **vast**. He is linked to the people of God in all generations (like him, members of the faith family), and most strangely of all, to the whole history of Israel, the curious continuity of the race of the faithful from Abraham. By this means, the history of Israel is part of Church history, and all Christians of whatever nationality, are landed by adoption with several millennia of someone else's history<sup>20</sup>, with a whole set of ideas, concepts, and assumptions which do not necessarily square with the rest of their cultural inheritance; and the Church in every land, of whatever race and type of society, has this same adoptive past by which it needs to interpret the fundamentals of the faith. The adoption into Israel becomes a "universalizing" factor, bringing Christians of all cultures and ages together through a common inheritance, lest any of us make the Christian faith such a place to feel at home that no one else can live there; and bringing into everyone's society some sort of outside reference.

### **The Future of Christian Theology and Its Cultural Conditioning**

In the remainder of this paper I would like to suggest something of the relevance of the tension between the indigenizing and the pilgrim principles for the future of Christian theology.

First, let us recall that within the last century there has been a massive southward shift of the center of gravity of the Christian world, so that the representative Christian lands now appear to be in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and other parts of the southern continents. This means that Third World theology is now likely to be the representative Christian theology. On present trends (and I recognize that these may not be permanent) the theology of European Christians, while important for them and their continued existence, may become a matter of specialist interest to historians (rather as the theology of the Syriac Essene Church is specialist matter for early Church historians of today, not a topic for the ordinary student and general reader, whose eyes are turned to the Greco-Roman world when he studies the history of doctrine). The future general reader of Church history is more likely to be concerned with Latin American and African, and perhaps some

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<sup>20</sup> "The first fact of the Church [is] that we are Gentiles who worship the God of the Jews" - with *their* psalms, in Gentile languages but their concepts (Paul van Buren, "The Mystery and Salvation and Prayer," *Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Studies Yearbook* [Jerusalem, 1977-78], pp. 37-52).



Asian, theology. It is perhaps significant that in the last few years we have seen for the first time works of theology composed in the Third World (the works of Latin American theologians of liberation, such as Gutierrez, Segundo, and Miguez Bonino) becoming regular reading in the West—not just for missiologists, but for the general theological reader. The fact that particular Third World works of theology appear on the Western market is not, however, a necessary measure of their intrinsic importance. It simply means that publishers think them sufficiently relevant to the West to sell there. Theology is addressed to the setting in which it is produced.

This is perhaps the most important point to remember about theology: that since it springs out of practical situations, it is therefore *occasional* and *local* in character. Since we have mentioned Gutierrez, some words of his may be quoted here. Theology, he says, arises spontaneously and inevitably in the believer, in all who have accepted the gift of the word of God. There is therefore in every believer, and every community of believers, at least a rough outline of a theology. This conviction leads to another: whatever else theology is, it is what Gutierrez calls "critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the word."<sup>21</sup> That is, theology is about testing your actions by Scripture.

In this, of course, we are hearing the typical modern Latin American theologian, who is stung by the fact that it has taken Marxists to point out things that Amos and Isaiah *said* long ago, while Christians have found good theological reasons to justify the position of Jeroboam, Manasseh, and Dives, and is nagged by the remark of Bernanos that "God does not choose the same men to keep his word as to fulfill it." But it is likely to be the way of things also in Africa. The domestic tasks of Third World theology are going to be so basic, so vital, that there will be little time for the barren, sterile, time-wasting by-paths into which so much Western theology and theological research has gone in recent years. Theology in the Third World will be, as theology at all creative times has always been, about *doing* things, about things that deeply affect the lives of numbers of people. We see something of this already in South African Black Theology, which is literally about life and death matters (as one South African Black theologian put it to me, "Black Theology is about how to stay Christian when you're a Black in South Africa, and you're hanging on by the skin of your teeth"). There is no need to go back to wars of religion when men shed blood for their theologies: but at least there is something to be said for having a theology about things which are worth shedding blood for. And that, Third World Theology is likely to be.

Because of this relation of theology to action, theology arises out of situations that actually happen, not from broad general principles. Even the Greek Church, with centuries of intellectual and rhetorical tradition, took almost 200 years to produce a book of theology written for its own sake, Origen's *De Principiis*. In those two centuries innumerable theological books were written, but not for the sake of producing theologies. The theology was for a purpose: to *explain* the faith to outsiders, or to point out where the writer thought someone else had misrepresented what Christians meant.

It is therefore important, when thinking of African theology, to remember that it will act **on an** African agenda. It is useless for us to determine what we think an African theology ought to be doing: it will concern itself with questions that worry Africans, and will leave blandly alone all sorts of questions which we think absolutely vital. We all do the same. How many Christians belonging to churches which accept the Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith could explain with any conviction to an intelligent non-Christian why it is important not to be a Nestorian or a Monophysite? Yet once men not only excommunicated each other, they shed their own and others' blood to get the right

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<sup>21</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London: SCM, 1973; rev. ed., with new introduction, 1988), pp. 6-15.

answer on that question. The things which we think are vital points of principle will seem as far away and negligible to African theologians as those theological prize fights among the Egyptian monks now seem to us.

Conversely the things that concern African theologians may seem to us at best peripheral. Remembering the emergence of theology at a popular level, it is noteworthy how African Independent churches sometimes seem to pick on a point which strikes us by its oddity or irrelevance, like rules about worship during the menstrual period. But this is usually because the topic, or the sort of topic, is a major one for certain African Christians, just as it apparently was for the old Hebrews, and it needs an answer, and an answer related to Christ. There often turns out to be a sort of coherence in the way in which these churches deal with it, linking Scripture, old traditions, and the Church as the new Levitical community—and giving an answer to something that had been worrying people. In short, it is safe for a European to make only one prediction about the valid, authentic African Biblical theology we all talk about: that it is likely either to puzzle us or to disturb us.

But is not the sourcebook of all valid theology the canonical Scriptures? Yes, and in that as the spaceman found, lies the continuity of the Christian faith. But, as he also found, the Scriptures are read with different eyes by people in different times and places; and practice, each age and community makes its own selection of the Scriptures, giving prominence to those, which seem to speak most clearly to the community's time and place and leaving aside others which do not appear to yield up their gold so readily. How many of us, while firm as a rock as to its canonicity, seriously look to the book of Leviticus for sustenance? Yet many an African Independent church has found it abundantly relevant. (Interestingly, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the great nineteenth-century Yoruba missionary bishop, thought it should be among the first books of the Bible to be translated).

The indigenizing principle ensures that each community recognizes in Scripture that God is speaking to its own situation. But it also means that we all approach Scripture wearing cultural blinkers, with assumptions determined by our time and place. It astonishes us when we read second-century Christian writers who all venerated Paul, and to whom we owe the preservation of his writings, that they never seem to understand what we are sure he means by justification by faith. It is perhaps only in our own day, when we do not read Plato so much, that Western Christians have begun to believe that the resurrection of the body is not the immortality of the soul, or to recognize the solidly material content of biblical salvation. Africans will have their cultural blinkers, too, which will prevent, or at least render it difficult for them to see some things. But they will doubtless be different things from those hidden in our own blind spots, so they should be able to see some things much better than we do.

That wise old owl, Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society, reflecting on the Great Commission in 1868, argued that the fullness of the Church would only come with the fullness of the national manifestations of different national churches:

Inasmuch as all native churches grow up into the fullness of the stature of Christ, distinctions and defects will vanish.... But it may be doubted whether, to the last, the Church of Christ will not exhibit marked national characteristics which, in the overruling grace of God, will tend to its perfection and glory.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps it **is not** only that different ages and nations see different things, in Scripture—it is that they *need* to see different things.

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<sup>22</sup> Instructions of the Committee of the Church Missionary Society to Departing Missionaries, June 30, 1868, reproduced in W. Knight, *The Missionary Secretariat of Henry Venn* (1880, p. 284).

The major theological debate in independent Africa<sup>23</sup> just now—Item 1 on the African theological agenda—would appear to be the nature of the African past. Almost every major work by an African scholar in the field of religions—Harry Sawyerr,<sup>24</sup> Bolaji Idowu,<sup>25</sup> J. S. Mbiti,<sup>26</sup> Vincent Mulago<sup>27</sup> is in some way dealing with it. Now each of the authors named was trained in theology on a Western model; but each has moved into an area for which no Western syllabus prepared him, for each has been forced to study and lecture on African traditional religion—and each has found himself writing on it. It seems to me, however, that they all approach this topic, not as historians of religions do, nor as anthropologists do. They are still, in fact, Christian theologians. All are wrestling with a theological question, the prime one on the African Christian's intellectual agenda: who am I? What is my relation as an African Christian to Africa's past?

Thus, when Idowu concludes with such passion that the *orisas* are only manifestations of Olodumare, and that it is a Western misrepresentation to call Yoruba religion polytheistic, the urgency in his voice arises from the fact that he is not making a clinical observation of the sort one might make about Babylonian religion: he is handling dynamite, his own past, his people's present. One can see why a non-Christian African writer like Okot p'Bitek, who glories in pre-Christian Africa, accuses John Mbiti and others so bitterly of continuing the Western missionary misrepresentation of the past. It is as though he were saying "They are taking from us our own decent paganism, and plastering it over with interpretations from alien sources." Here speaks the authentic voice of Celsus.<sup>28</sup>

The mention of Celsus reminds us perhaps that African Christians are not the first people to have a religious identity crisis. Gentile Christians had precisely the same issue to face—an issue that never faced the Jewish missionaries, Paul, Peter, Barnabas. They knew who they were ("circumcised the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin . . ."), just as Western missionaries for more than 150 confident years knew who *they* were. It is our past which tells us who we are; without our past we are lost. The man with amnesia is lost, unsure of relationships, incapable of crucial decisions, precisely because all the time he has amnesia he is without his past. Only when his memory returns, when he is sure of his past, is he able to relate confidently to his wife, his parents, or know his place in a society.

Early Gentile Christianity went through a period of amnesia. It was not so critical for first-generation converts: they responded to a clear choice, turned from idols to serve the living God, accepted the assurance that they had been grafted into Israel. It was the second and third generations of Christians who felt the strain more. What was their relation to the Greek past? Some of them (some indeed in the first generation, as the New Testament indicates) solved the problem by pretending their Greek past did not exist, by pretending they were Jews, adopting Jewish customs, even to circumcision. Paul saw this coming and roundly condemned it. You are *Trot* Jews, he argues in Romans 9-11; you *are* Israel, but grafted into it. And, defying all the realities of horticulture, he talks about a wild plant being grafted into a cultivated one. But one thing he is saying is that Gentile Christianity is part of the *wild* olive. It is different in character from the plant into which it is grafted. Such is the necessity of the indigenizing principle.

<sup>23</sup> Independent Africa" is here distinguished from South Africa, where different conditions have produced different priorities and a different debate.

<sup>24</sup> See Harry Sawyerr, *God—Ancestor or Creator?* (1970).

<sup>25</sup> See Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (1962) and *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (1973).

<sup>26</sup> See John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (Oxford, 1971); *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969); and *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970).

<sup>27</sup> See Vincent Mulago, "Christianisme et culture africaine," in C.G. Baeta, ed., *Christianity in Tropical Africa* (1968), pp. 308-28.

<sup>28</sup> See Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala, 1971).

Later Gentile Christians, by then the majority in the Church, and in no danger of confusing themselves with Jews, had a major problem. Yes, they were grafted into Israel. The sacred history of Israel was part of their history. Yes, the idolatry and immorality of their own society, past and present, must have nothing to do with them. But what was God doing in the Greek world all those centuries while he was revealing himself in judgment and mercy to Israel? Not all the Greek past was graven images and temple prostitution. What of those who testified for righteousness—and even died for it? Had God nothing to do with their righteousness? What of those who taught things that are true—that are according to reason, *logos*, opposed to the Great Lies taught and practiced by others? Had their *logos* nothing to do with The Logos, the light that lighteth every man coming into the world? Is there any truth which is not God's truth? Was God not active in the Greek past, not just the Jewish? So Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria came up with their own solutions, that there were Christians before Christ, that philosophy was – and is – the schoolmaster to bring the Greeks to Christ, just as was the Law for Jews.

This is no place to renew the old debate about continuity or discontinuity of Christianity with pre-Christian religion, nor to discuss the theology of Justin and Clement, nor to consider the correctness of Idowu and Mbiti. My point is simply that the two latter are wrestling with essentially the same problem as the two former, and that it seems to be the most urgent problem facing African Christians today, on their agenda. Until it is thought through, amnesia could make African Christianity tentative and unsure of its relationships, and unable to recognize important tasks. More than one answer may emerge; the early centuries, after all, saw the answer of Tertullian as well as of Clement. And there may be little that outsiders can do to assist. Once again Paul saw what was coming. "Is He not," he asks his Jewish interlocutor, and on the most thoroughly Jewish grounds, "the God of the Gentiles also?" (Rom. 3:29f.).

The debate will certainly reflect the continuing tension between the indigenizing and the pilgrim principles of the Gospel. Paul, Justin, and Clement all knew people who followed one without the other. Just as there were "pilgrims" who sought to follow, or to impose upon others the modes of thought and life, concerns and preconceptions which belonged to some-one else, so there were Greek-educated "indigenizers" who sought to eliminate what they considered "barbarian" elements from Christianity such as the Resurrection and the Last Judgment. But these things were part of a framework which ultimately derived from the Christian faith, and thus they played down, or ignored, or explicitly rejected, the Old Testament, the Christian adoptive past. Perhaps the most important thing to remember about the opponents of these Gnostics is that they were just as Greek as the Gnostics themselves, with many of the same instincts and difficulties; but they knew instinctively that they must hold to their adoptive past, and in doing so saved the Scriptures for the Church. Perhaps the real test of theological authenticity is the capacity to incorporate the history of Israel and God's people and to treat it as one's own.

When the Scriptures are read in some enclosed Zulu Zion, the hearers may catch the voice of God speaking out of a different Zion, and speaking to the whole world. When a comfortable bourgeois congregation meets in some Western suburbia, they, almost alone of all the comfortable bourgeois of the suburbs, are regularly exposed to the reading of a non-bourgeois book questioning fundamental assumptions of their society. But since none of us can read the Scriptures without cultural blinkers of some sort, the great advantage, the crowning excitement which our own era of Church history over all others, is the possibility that we may be able to read them together. Never before has the Church looked so much like the great multitude whom no man can number out of every nation and tribe and people and tongue.

Never before, therefore, has there been so much potentiality for mutual enrichment and self-criticism, as God causes yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> I have quoted here sentences from my paper "African and Christian Identity," which first appeared in the Mennonite journal *Mission Focus* and was later reprinted in W.R. Shenk, ed., *Mission Focus—Current Issues* (Scottsdale, Penna.: Herald Press, 1980).

# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## *Unit 2*

### *Creation & Fall*



## Development Associates International

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## Unit 2 – Creation & Fall

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### Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Explain the biblical foundation of human rights and discuss from Scripture the belief that we are *ALL TOGETHER* created equally in the image of God.
- Analyze our need for an “external” identity, i.e., that as a created being, you are not self-contained; therefore you derive your identity from something or someone external to you.
- Examine the concept of *identity at the expense of another* as it applies to the way you relate to people, talk about people, or exalt yourself above other people.
- Assess the ways that you use to de-humanize others (i.e., language, stereotypes, etc.)

## Introduction: a confession from the author

All of the problems cited in this Unit are my problems. You see, at the core of my identity lies a degree of insecurity. If you asked me the question, “Who are you,” I would define myself by external characteristics like my family name, my academic accomplishments, my financial worth, my career status, my nationality or my cultural heritage. If that wasn’t sufficient, then – like the characters Adam and Eve – I would define myself in contrast to others that I felt superior to. “I’m not poor” or “I’m not African American” or even “I am not a woman.”

Although I grew up in the United States in an environment that was made up of the white, lower middle-class, European-descended community, we still exercised our own versions of *ethnocentricity*. The richer people felt superior to the poorer people; the Catholics felt superior to the Protestants (or visa versa), and everyone seemed to feel superior to people who were not white. Even within the white community, we had our own versions of superiority. The Italians told jokes that made the Irish look stupid; the Irish told jokes that made the Polish look stupid; and the Polish told jokes that made the Russians look stupid.

My life went on without much opposition until I took a course taught by an African American man. His course was simply entitled “Racism” but I took it because I was sure I had no inclination to racism. I had no ill feelings towards people with darker skin. How could I? I scarcely knew any!

His course was built on this basic issue of identity, and he taught that Racism (and a wide variety of other “Isms” like ethnocentrism, classism, sexism, etc.) was basically one group of people finding their identity at the expense of someone else over whom they felt superior. The feelings of superiority were based on external things like race, ethnicity, wealth, or gender.

The problem, according to the professor, was that external sources of identity were fluctuating and would constantly leave us feeling insecure. For example, if I assumed that I was superior to African Americans because “all black people are poor,” what happens when I meet a rich black person? Or if I assume that a certain ethnic group is stupid, what happens to my identity when I meet a person from that group who is smarter than I am?

The solution? I need to find our security in something internal and unchanging. In other words, I needed to start finding my sense of identity in God. I took that course over 25 years ago, but this core truth has transformed my relationships: when I understand that every human being is created in the image of God, everything changes in how I relate to others.

This is the topic of this Unit.

### Think about it?

Answer Box # 1

*Think back to Unit 1. When you introduce yourself to others, how did you answer the question, “Who are you?” Examine all the external traits by which you identify yourself. Why don’t we simply respond to people “I am” like God did (Exodus 3:13-14)?*



learning



The Bible affirms that every human being is created in the image of God – equally, beautifully, and uniquely. As a result, we must view every other person as an equal. To despise the “other” – regardless of our myriad cultural or ethnic differences – is to despise our Creator.

When the Bible affirms that God created humankind, it provides us with a sense of worth and identity. We belong to God. We are created in the image of God. Our identity derives from our Father. He creates and sustains our lives: in him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

### **CASE STUDY: What Motivated William Wilberforce?**

Around the world – especially the world of the former British Empire – William Wilberforce is regarded as a hero because of his persistent and ultimately successful fight to abolish slavery. Writing a summation of the life of Wilberforce,<sup>1</sup> Kevin Belmonte observes the two most historic moments in Wilberforce’s legislative career:

The evening of February 23, 1807, was unforgettable. In the British House of Commons, parliamentary debate had commenced on the Second Reading of a bill calling for the **abolition of the British slave trade**. For twenty years, similar bills had been introduced again and again only to go down to defeat.

But this night would be different. As the debate began, one member of Parliament after another rose to praise the man who had refused to accept defeat in his efforts to secure the abolition of the trade--William Wilberforce....

Twenty-six years later, and just three days before he died, a gravely ill Wilberforce (1759-1833) received word that Parliament had voted to **abolish slavery itself throughout Britain's colonies**. When he passed away, he did so safe in the knowledge that he had done all he could do for the sons and daughters of Africa. He had labored for 46 years.

**But what motivated this enduring battle?** Belmonte continues later in the article,

Wilberforce's steadfast commitment to the equality of all was one of the first principles that flowed from his Christian faith. He believed, along with the writer of the New Testament Book of Acts, that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26). Based upon his understanding of the golden rule – the belief that we should treat others in the way we want to be treated – he felt it was his duty to "follow peace with all men, and look upon them as members of the same family." Every person, likewise, was "entitled to the debts of justice [and] to the . . . liberal claims of fraternal kindness."

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=WT02L1>

### Think about it?

Answer Box # 2

**For reflection:** believing in the equality of all people created in the image of God motivated Wilberforce, but he is unique in the way that he used his legislative position to “defend the rights of slaves who had no voice in the British legislature.” As such, some refer to Wilberforce as a “voice for the voiceless.”

Think of your own community: who are the voiceless people that God (their Creator) might be calling you to speak on behalf of? How will you do it?



learning

The foundation of being created in the image of God attacks at its core our propensities towards superiority, favoritism, partiality, and racism. Before our creator, we are equally valuable, equally loved, equally beautiful. John Stott roots his teaching on respect for ethnic diversity and commitment to human rights in the doctrine of creation. He writes:

The origin of human rights is creation. Man has never 'acquired' them. Nor has any government or other authority conferred them. Man has had them from the beginning. He received with his life from the hand of his Maker. They are inherent in his creation. They have been bestowed on him by his Creator <sup>2</sup>

Answer Box # 3

*Think of three relationships in your own life (co-workers from other cultures, poor people you see on the streets, etc.). How would your life change if you really believed that quotation: All people are created in the image of God, and therefore all races and ethnic groups have the same status and unique value that results from the image of God?*



learning

<sup>2</sup> John Stott. Involvement: Volume 1: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1985), p. 195.

Out of the creation of individuals, God has also created culture (a topic we'll evaluate in the next unit). Culture contains the unique human expressions of external things like music, language, traditions, and food and internal things like relational or decision-making styles. This diversity, however, is never intended to be a justification for separation and superior posturing; instead, like the 9000 species of birds and thousands of species of flowers, insects, and animals, our cultural diversity should be seen as reflections of God's created glory manifested in various forms. Hays underscores our common ground of being created in the image of God when he writes, "All people are created in the image of God, and therefore all races and ethnic groups have the same status and unique value that results from the image of God."<sup>3</sup>

West African scholar Lamin Sanneh connects the biblical teaching on the creation of each person with diverse cultures (especially as "culture" is defined linguistically) as our foundation for mission to all peoples:

Human beings are made in the image of God, and Jesus in his defining Jewishness is the archetype of humanity's imperishable divine potential, the cosmic symbol of what God has for us. History is impregnated with the spirit of ethnic authentication, and the gospel compels us to reimagine humanity in the specificity of God's reconciling work, to the end that humanity, nurtured in its fundamental mother tongue idiom, may experience a new birth to life, to the end that all God's children may have a second chance.<sup>4</sup>

### Creation as the Basis for Human Rights

Humanity in its diversity and fallen condition inevitably will use our differences as a reason for separation. We compare culture against culture, riches against poverty, male against female, educated against uneducated – usually with the intent of self-exaltation. The doctrine of creation undercuts these comparisons and forces us to remember that we all derive our identity and

Answer Box #4

Read Acts 17:26-28. What do these verses teach us about our common origins?



**bible study**

<sup>3</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> Lamin Sanneh. Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

our being from one Creator.

In the book of Proverbs, the writer affirms that oppressing of the poor is contempt towards the Creator, while kindness to the poor honors God (Proverbs 14:31). Proverbs 17:5 similarly affirms that “he who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker.” The biblical point is this: comparisons and judgments against those who are different – especially against those over whom we might feel superior – shows contempt or defiance towards our common Creator.

Even the secular world realizes the need to affirm the value of every human individual as the basis for human rights. In *The U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the very foundation (the first statement in the Preamble) is the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all the members of the human family” as the “foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.” Article 1 goes on to assert that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Post-modernity and the societal departure from a biblical sense of Creation have laid a foundation for the decline of the human sense of identity and the corresponding protection of human rights. Dick Keyes writes, “The high view of humanity as the image of God has not survived the subtraction of God... Without a transcendent point of reference, something

### Answer Box # 5

Read the *U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (the document begins on page 24 of this Unit). The authors of this Declaration do not provide any basis for this “inherent dignity” other than common humanity. Without the doctrine of creation, i.e., if all human beings are *not assumed to be* created in the image of God, what is the basis for honoring another human being?



### learning

truly beyond our identity, we ourselves shrink... The human attempt to manufacture an identity apart from God has failed.”<sup>5</sup>

Following on this line of thinking, Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra observe, “The death of God does not, as Nietzsche believed, lead to the glorification of man; but, rather takes from men and women any claim they may have to be treated with reverence by their fellows.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Dick Keyes. *Beyond Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stick Publishers, 1998), p. 12-16.

<sup>6</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. *The Message of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), p. 38.

## Answer Box # 6

**Historical reflection:** *in the American story of endorsing slavery, tradition says that the writers of the United States earliest political policies counted the slaves as 3/5 of a human. Why do you think they did this?*

*Do you know other examples from your context or in your nation that show the same tendency to treat other groups in society not as fully humans?*

**learning**

They continue, documenting the need for the doctrine of creation as the foundation of human rights and inter-personal relationships:

What finally makes a society worth living in is not the amount of consumer goods available in shopping malls, nor the effectiveness of its social-welfare schemes, nor even the lack of discrimination in employment and education, but the sense all people should have of being valued and appreciated by their neighbors. The biblical understanding of the *imago Dei* restores the language of ‘human rights’ to its proper anchoring in a larger framework of our mutual responsibility for one another before God. Where rights are regarded as purely formal, legal entities – disembedded from practices that affirm the relational nature of our human personhood – the public sphere of civil society withers. We are reduced to a set of mutually antagonistic groups, each asserting its rights against the other.<sup>7</sup>

Human beings have three fundamental questions:

- Identity: Who am I?
- Community: Where do I belong?
- Transcendence: What is it worth?

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<sup>7</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, p. 41.

The Fall (Adam and Eve's choice to sin against God) hampered our ability to answer all three questions. Sin broke our relationship with God and with ourselves – so we no longer have an immovable source as the basis for our identity. Sin likewise introduced interpersonal conflict and broke our ability to be in an unconditionally accepting, loving community. And sin took away our sense of long-term meaning because it broke our relationship with God, the transcendent One.

## Answer Box # 7

**Biblical reflection:** read these three case studies that demonstrate Jesus' interpersonal relationships with people. In what ways does Jesus treatment of each of these people reflect his respect for the dignity of the person?

- Mark 5: 1-20 – the Gerasene Demoniac
- John 3:1-21 – Nicodemus
- John 4: 1-42 – the Samaritan woman

**bible study****Implications for relationships across cultures**

It is worth noting two significant implications if we understand that we are created in the image of God (what scholars refer to as the *imago Dei*). First, this doctrine will set Christians apart as totally counter-cultural in cultures dominated by other religions and worldviews which do not affirm the value of every individual. Vinoth Ramachandra, writing from his own context of Civil War-torn Sri Lanka, dominated by Buddhist and Hindu worldviews, observes, "There are serious doubts whether a vision of human rights can be argued for coherently and sustained effectively in societies which lack an appropriate theological understanding of

the human person.”<sup>8</sup> He goes on, “It is doubtful whether respect for all human beings can flourish in societies untouched by the biblical vision.”<sup>9</sup>

Second, the biblical understanding that every individual is created in the image of God provides the Christian imperative for caring for those that society rejects – even the “least of these.” Peskett and Ramachandra document that the morality of killing deformed or sickly newborns was not even questioned until the birth of the Christian church. Then they quote medical doctor Darrell Amundsen whose research on the care of defective children in the ancient world revealed that, “The first espousal of an idea of inherent human value in Western civilization depended on a belief that every human being was formed in the image of God.”<sup>10</sup>

### Creation and Identity



**bible study**

Answer Box # 8

#### ***Biblical reflection:***

Read Genesis 2 and 3 as well as 9:6. What does being “created in the image of God” teach us about our identity and security? When the relationship with God is broken, how does this change the way that we relate to others

The doctrine of creation affects how we view ourselves. This is essential because in interpersonal relationships – especially across cultures and across wide ranges of diversity – we need a secure sense of our own identity so that we have

<sup>8</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, p. 42.

freedom to relate to the “other”. If we ourselves are insecure, our identity is defined by external sources rather than based on our sense of being created in the image of God.

The doctrine of creation also affects the way we view others. If we see them as created in the image of God, we are forced to realize that they have equal worth before God. All foundations for racism, ethnocentrism, and partiality are destroyed.

Commenting on the Creation account in Genesis 1-3, Peskett and Ramachandra observe:

Human personhood is constituted by relationality. Just as God relates to us and at the same time remains other than us, so within the human community we are related in diversity. Personal freedom implies a space between each other that is to be respected, and yet we do not find our fulfillment as persons apart from God and one another. Thus, the ‘other’, far from being a threat to my unique identity, is the one without whom I would have no identity. ***It is this fact of personhood, established by creation, that confers dignity and value to every human being.***<sup>11</sup>

Answer Box # 9

**Biblical reflection:**

*Read Matthew 5:21-22 and James 3:9-10. What do these verses teach about the significance of our language – especially when it comes to exalting ourselves at the expense of another?*



**bible study**

### Sin Enters the World: The Fall

“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Genesis 3:7)

Adam and Eve’s choice to sin broke multiple relationships – humanity with God, humanity with nature, humanity with each other, and human beings with themselves. The Fall led to the human loss of identity (or at least the loss of our security in our identity). In psychological language, we lost our sense of “internal integration and wholeness” because we lost our connection with our Creator. The insecurity left us dependent on other externals by which we could define ourselves, and this created the relational environment where human beings began establishing ourselves against the “other.” From this relational breakdown

<sup>11</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, p. 38.



came the attitudes and behaviors that deny that God has made all people in his image – attitudes and behaviors which provide the foundation for ethnocentricity and racism.

The Fall, sin and the accompanying relational breakdown disconnects us with our Creator, so we enter into the world with a need to define our own identity, which we often do at the expense of another. After sin entered the world, Adam started blaming the woman and God, and the woman blamed the snake. Relationships were broken and inter-personal conflict was introduced.

For our purposes, the most significant effect of the Fall is seen in the impact of the sin. First, Adam and Eve experience shame (nakedness) in their relationship. Then they look for ways to cover themselves, a foreshadowing of the human (inadequate) endeavor for self-sufficiency. Then, when they are “caught” in their sin, God confronts them. Blaming illustrates the relational breakdown: Adam blames Eve and God, and Eve blames the snake.

The Fall sets in motion the human tendency to establish our identity at the expense of another. This “identity at the expense of another” – sometimes referred to as our “oppositional identity” – is at the root of destructive ethnocentrism (and all other “isms” (racism, sexism, classism, etc)). When human beings begin to reestablish their identity based on their belonging to God through Christ that they begin to be freed from this tendency.

James and Mary Tillman, in their investigation of why racism and poverty exists in the United States of America, point out that the way this culture forms a sense of identity causes the members to “need” people beneath them in order to feel good about themselves. The Tillmans call this an “exclusivity quotient” – the ability we have to exalt ourselves over others – based on race, economy, gender, education, etc. This “exclusivity quotient” is a result of the Fall. We form our identity and self-worth at the expense of others, much like the Pharisees who thanked God that they were neither Gentiles nor women. . . Until we understand what it means to find our identity “in Christ,” we’ll have no alternative to the “exclusivity quotient” at the core of many cultures and societies.<sup>12</sup>

Answer Box # 10

Think of one example recently when someone said something unkind to you about someone else, designed to make that person look smaller, so that they would look greater.

<sup>12</sup> James and Mary Tillman. Why America Needs Poverty and Racism: An Examination of the Exclusivity Compulsion in American Race and Poverty Relations (self-published, 1969).

Thus, creation in all its diversity provides us with the basis of a healthy sense of our ethnic identity, but the Fall corrupts this identity and diversity deteriorates into competition, comparison, or oppression of the other. Unlike other created beings, we human beings being to prey on each other. J. Andrew Kirk summarizes these competing tensions well:

At its best, ethnic and cultural distinctiveness thus reflects the rich diversity of human life and allows people a sense of security in being able to identify with a group of people with its own history, customs, and traditions. The loss of such association (rootlessness) can lead to a crisis of selfhood and eventually to personality disorders.

On the other hand, the stress on ethnicity can lead to vigorous tribalism and communalism in which belonging to one ethnic group entails hostility to others. This can become pathological, if the main way we affirm our own self is by despising others or rejecting their right to be different. At its worst, this manifestation of culture leads to the horrors of racism and caste prejudice, with their deceitful and perverted notions of cultural superiority and racial purity.<sup>13</sup>

Answer Box # 11

**Biblical reflection:**

*Read Philippians 3:4-14. In what ways does Paul deal with his identity? How does he exemplify some who is trying to make Jesus the center of his identity?*



**bible study**

<sup>13</sup> J. Andrew Kirk. What Is Mission? Theological Explorations (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 78.

## What About Noah's Curse on Ham and Canaan?

In a seminar several years ago at the Overseas Ministries Study Center (New Haven, CT, USA), African theologian Dr. Tite Tienou made the shocking observation that Western missionaries were, as late as the early 1900's, still evaluating whether or not Africans had full souls. Their debate was based on the so-called "curse of Ham."

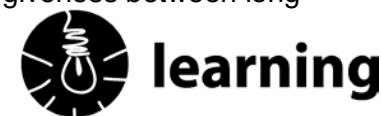
The impact of the Fall and a journey into the book of Genesis requires us to address the question of Noah's curse on Ham and his son, Canaan, in Genesis 9: 20-27. This passage, misunderstood and misapplied accordingly has been used to justify the enslavement of the black race that occurred in the United States after 1619. Since some of Ham's descendants populated Africa, Noah's curse (some conclude) must therefore apply to all those who are from Africa. The passage was further applied in South Africa by the architects of Apartheid. The designers saw the Africans as equal to the Canaanite sons of Noah and Ham who needed to be dispossessed from the land God was supposed to give them.<sup>14</sup>

Many in the southern part of the United States prior to the Civil War used this argument to justify racial slavery. Unfortunately this perception about Noah's curse remains today.<sup>15</sup>

Eckman evaluates the text and concludes, "it is simply impossible to see any justification for slavery or any other aspect of inferiority from the curse on Canaan. It is a gross distortion of God's Word to do so."<sup>16</sup> J. Daniel Hays complements Eckman's explanation. He argues that the curse on Canaan should be interpreted in its historical context as a reference to the later defeat of the Canaanites by Israel upon entering the Promised Land – and nothing in relationship to the peoples of Africa.<sup>17</sup> Although it is an outrageous abuse of the Scriptures to try to justify slavery by linking Noah's curse to the contemporary inhabitants of Africa, the misapplication of the biblical text illustrates two things about the impact of the Fall on human relationships.

First, it illustrates generally the human tendency to exalt ourselves at the expense of others who are different than ourselves – especially if such exaltation allows us greater power over them. And second, it illustrates specifically the historical "baggage" that exists in the world in which we live.

Being reconciled in human relationships – in this case Blacks and Whites – will require repentance and forgiveness between long separated peoples.



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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.bethel.edu/~letnie/AfricanChristianity/SAAfrikanerChurches.html>.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed examination of this historical reality, see Stephen R. Haynes. Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> James P. Eckman, "The Ethics of Race", Christian Ethics in a Postmodern World (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Training Association, 1999), pp. 74-75.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Hays, From Every People and Nation, p. 56.

**Is Jesus at the core of my identity?**

*Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, black or white, brown or yellow – all these are socially constructed ways of defining and expressing ourselves over against others, and as such they contradict God’s purpose for humanity, the purpose of cohumanity with and for one another, as disclosed in one new human, Jesus of Nazareth. The question that Jesus’ new humanity forces upon us is this: Has our ability to internalize and externalize Christian identity been constrained and even contradicted by our loyalty and allegiance to other reference groups, including our racial group? Has our old oppositional humanity compromised the response-ability and relations that God intends for God’s human creatures? Have we failed to discern God’s self-disclosure in the reconciliation in Jesus Christ because we prefer the blinders that come with self- and group-interest? Have we declined to express this reconciliation because we are more comfortable with our old ways of living and our default position is consistent with the temper of our times? (Douglas R. Sharp. No Partiality: The Idolatry of Race and the New Humanity, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 274.*

*Evaluate your own way of looking at yourself – either by your own choices or by values that others in your family or society instilled in you. How has your ability to internalize and externalize Christian identity been constrained and even contradicted by your loyalty and allegiance to other reference groups?*

**A Practical Application Exercise** (by Neil Rendall, used by permission from:

<http://www.urbana.org/articles.cfm?RecordId=211>)

*How can we work through some of the tensions in our communities or jobs or churches between people who are racially or ethnically different? Here is an exercise that can be adapted to either small or large-group settings in an effort to help people relate more easily across ethnic differences.*

- 1) *As individuals, take a minute to respond personally to the following question: Whom did your family, relatives, neighborhood, community teach you to reject? look down on? laugh at? not associate with? feel superior to? fear or hate? feel inferior to? be jealous of?*
- 2) *Now take five minutes together in very small groups of two or three to share your thoughts with each other.*
- 3) *In the larger group, let a spokesperson from each smaller group share a few observations about what was said.*
- 4) *Move on by asking some of the following questions and getting a response from the group. (Some appropriate responses and thoughts are in brackets.)*
  - *Who made these people you talked about? [God did.]*

**application**

- *Does God love them? [Yes.]*
- *Do you love them? [Responses will vary, depending on the size and intimacy of the group.]*
- *Where do these deep-seated feelings come from? [They are culturally imprinted upon us as we grow up.]*
- *How can we change those feelings? [They are so indelibly imprinted on us that we may never be able to remove them. We may see some movement, but we may only be able to ask God to continually forgive us and help us.]*

## Final Assignment



### Final Assignment

- 1) Explain what it means to derive our sense of identity from an external source by reflecting back on your childhood and evaluating any of the direct and indirect lessons learned about your own identity – especially the “who I am not” aspects of these lessons.
- 2) Write an updated version of the prayer of the Pharisee (Luke 18) as it might be prayed in your church.
- 3) Imagine an employee who is constantly alienating others by belittling them, making insulting ethnic or racial remarks, or by simply exalting himself. Write him a letter explaining the concept of *identity at the expense of another*, and then make suggestions as to how he can change his behavior.

## Readings

### U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights



Source: <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

(at this Web site you can even read the declaration in many different languages !)



*all human rights for all*  
FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
**1948-1998**

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights

*Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948*

On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the full text of which appears in the following pages. Following this historic act the Assembly called upon all Member countries to publicize the text of the Declaration and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories."

#### ***PREAMBLE***

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

**Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

***Article 1.***

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

***Article 2.***

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

***Article 3.***

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

***Article 4.***

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

***Article 5.***

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

***Article 6.***

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

***Article 7.***

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

***Article 8.***

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

***Article 9.***

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

***Article 10.***

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

***Article 11.***

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.



***Article 12.***

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

***Article 13.***

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
- (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

***Article 14.***

- (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
- (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

***Article 15.***

- (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

***Article 16.***

- (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
- (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
- (3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

***Article 17.***

- (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

***Article 18.***

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

***Article 19.***

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

***Article 20.***

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

***Article 21.***

- (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
- (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

***Article 22.***

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

***Article 23.***

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

***Article 24.***

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

***Article 25.***

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

***Article 26.***

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

***Article 27.***

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

***Article 28.***

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

***Article 29.***

- (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
- (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.
- (3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

***Article 30.***

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

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# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## *Unit 3*

### *And God created Diversity*



Culture, Ethnicity and Culture, Ver. 1.4

## Development Associates International

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Version 1.4

# Unit 3 – And God created Diversity

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Locate one key passage in Genesis that emphasizes the fact that cultures and diversity were God’s creation
- Illustrate four ways that the church has often responded to the culture in which it is located.
- Choose behaviors in relating to others which will enable you to gain an appreciation of the fact that if all peoples and cultures are “created in the image of God”, then every person who is culturally different has something to teach you about God’s character.

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### *Introduction and Author's Note*

At an international conference in Singapore, I was thrown into a situation that involved 300 people from over 70 countries. Even though every one at the conference was a Christian, we were very different from each other. In addition to the obvious differences of language, other behaviors and actions struck me. First, the Singaporeans drove on the left; in my country, we drive on the right. Some of the conference members ate with chopsticks, others with utensils, and others with their bare hands. One fellow burped loudly after eating – a gesture that in his country was intended to compliment the chef. People dressed differently, smelled differently, and greeted each other differently. Some bowed; others kissed; others embraced.

Even when we worshipped, the differences between us stood out. Some came to worship in very formal attire – even though it was very hot. Others dressed casually and looked like they were on holiday. The preachers spoke with styles from their cultures, and music that was beautiful to some sounded terrible to others. Some came from churches and cultures where they prayed quietly. Others prayed aloud – together – all at once! The way the Bible was read, the posture that we took as we prayed, the way that people responded all reflected the many cultures out of which we had come.

The conference introduced me to the diversity of the Body of Christ, and through the week, we all had to adjust to accept and understand that brothers and sisters from around the world were often quite different from each other. These differences are the subject of this Unit.

### Think about it

Answer Box #1

**To get started:**

What is culture? What makes up culture and cultural differences? In what ways is culture a positive force? A negative force? Both?



**learning**

**Review:**

*In Unit 1*, we introduced a definition of culture that was composed by the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization. They defined culture as “an integrated system of **beliefs** (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of **values** (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of **customs** (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.), and of **institutions** which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.), **which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.**

*In Unit 2*, we reflected on the biblical teaching that all human beings are created in the image of God. Therefore, all lives are valuable and deserving of dignity regardless of gender, nation, race, tribe, tongue, ethnicity, or culture.

Answer Box # 2

**Reflection:** in light of the definition above, list some of the distinctive marks of your own culture or ethnic heritage?



**learning**

**Biblical Foundations**

In Genesis 1:26-28, God commands human beings to “cultivate” the creation. The word “culture” in English comes from the Latin word “colere” which means “to cultivate.” In many biblical commentaries, Genesis 1:26-28 is referred to as the “cultural mandate.” In some way, God has commanded us to go into the world and “create culture”. But what can this mean?

Paragraph 10 of the Lausanne Covenant, “Evangelism and Culture” states: “The development of strategies for world evangelization calls for imaginative pioneering methods. Under God, the result will be the rise of churches deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture.”

The writers are establishing the fact that every church in every culture must be contextualized to the culture in which it finds itself. But the writers go on to remind us that all aspects of culture must be tested and judged by Scripture. We are people created in the image of God; as a result, some parts of our cultures will be rich in beauty and goodness. But because of sin in the world,



there will be other aspects of our culture that will be affected by sin, other aspects that will be evil, and even some aspects that can be demonic.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that the Bible does not assume the superiority of any culture to another. Like people, we can say that “all cultures are created “equal” – though the writers of this document remind us that all cultures must be measured according to its own criteria of truth, righteousness, and adherence to biblical moral absolutes .

With the spread of Christianity to many corners of the earth, those who have brought the message from one culture to another have all too frequently exported with the gospel their own culture – so that they planted churches that were expressions of the culture of the messengers rather than the culture of the recipients. If the church is to be effective and culturally relevant, Christian leaders must be willing to “empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity in order to become the servants of others, and churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God.” (Mark 7:8, 9, 13; Gen. 4:21, 22; I Cor. 9:19-23; Phil. 2:5-7; II Cor. 4:5)<sup>1</sup>

In this same report, the authors offer this biblical foundation of culture. They explain that God created mankind male and female in his own likeness by endowing them with distinctive human faculties—rational, moral, social, creative and spiritual. He also told them to have children, to fill the earth and to subdue it (Gen. 1:26-28). These divine commands are the origin of human culture, for basic to culture are our control of nature (that is, our environment) and our development of forms of social organization. Insofar as we use our creative powers to obey God's commands, we glorify God, serve others and fulfill an important part of our destiny on earth.

When sin entered into God's creation (the Fall), the work was given a companion – sweat and struggle (Gen. 3:17-19). Relationships were disfigured by selfishness. So, in our present world, no culture is perfect in truth, beauty or goodness. All cultures are affected by sin and, as a result, there is an element of self-centeredness, of self-worship, and, of self-glory in all cultures – either in the culture's religious expressions or the way they view the world. ***For a culture to be truly transformed, therefore, there must be a strategic change of allegiance – from a cultural identity to a first allegiance under the Lordship of Christ.***

Nevertheless, the affirmation that we are made in God's image still stands<sup>2</sup> ), though the divine likeness has been distorted by sin. In the world, God expects us to exercise stewardship of the earth and of its creatures,<sup>3</sup> and in his common grace makes all persons inventive, resourceful and fruitful in their endeavors. Thus, although Genesis 3 records the fall of humanity, and Genesis 4 details Cain's murder of Abel, God's redemption is already at work, because it is Cain's descendants who are described as the cultural innovators, building cities, breeding livestock, and making musical instruments and metal tools.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, many of us evangelical Christians have been too negative towards culture. We concentrate on human fallenness and lostness which call for salvation in Christ, yet we fail to remember that the Creator God is behind the creation and expression of cultures. Even though we see the effects of sin in every culture, there is still a God-given positive affirmation of

<sup>1</sup> “The Willowbank Report: Report on a Consultation on Gospel and Culture” – (<http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=14322>)

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 9:6; James 3:9

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 9:1-3, 7

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 4:17-22

human dignity and human cultural achievement. Wherever human beings develop their social organization, art and science, agriculture and technology, their creativity reflects that of their Creator.<sup>5</sup>

### Four Approaches to Culture by the Church

Has the church been too negative towards culture? Experts on Christian history point out that the Church (and therefore individual Christians as well) has tended to relate to the culture out of which it comes in four ways (or more likely, a combination of these ways – depending on the issue<sup>6</sup>):

**Absorption** of the culture occurs when we bring the outside culture into the church without even evaluating the culture. This can be reflected by the “baptizing” of things like cultural traditions, adoption of nationalistic values, or observance of local customs as part of the church. The key component here is not proper contextualization but rather thoughtless, unevaluated absorption of cultural norms and calling them Christian.

**Engagement** with the culture occurs when a church or Christian community seeks to understand the culture out of which it came, interact with the values and traditions, and address it with a contextualized, thoughtful response.

**Defeatism** occurs when the church simply gives up trying to address the culture. This can occur when the church versus culture battle finds itself at one of two extremes. On the one end of the spectrum, the church takes a defeatist posture because the culture is perceived as being too sin-filled and beyond redemption. In this case, the church decides that the only avenue is to give up and withdraw. On the other end of the spectrum, the church gives up the fight against cultural evils. In this case, the church is so absorbed that leadership perceives that trying to be “counter-cultural” is worthless.

**Detachment** (a posture close to the first extreme in defeatism) often occurs where the church exists as an oppressed minority in a culture dominated by a non-Christian religion or a non-Christian worldview. The Christians see the culture as “altogether evil” and they deal with it only by withdrawal.

#### Answer Box # 3

**Reflection:** how has the church and the Christian community in your context responded to culture? Give one example of each of these reactions in the church in your context – absorption, engagement, defeatism, and detachment.



### learning

<sup>5</sup> “The Willowbank Report: Report on a Consultation on Gospel and Culture” – (<http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=14322>)

<sup>6</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr’s book, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner’s and Sons, 1960) is considered a classic work on this subject.

## Answer Box # 4

**Biblical reflection:** read Acts 17: 16-34 (Paul's sermon on Mars Hill in Athens)  
What observations do you make about how Paul related to the culture of the Athenians?



## bible study

### What about the Tower of Babel?

Are cultural differences and distinctiveness a blessing? Or are they a curse that separate us from each other? Before moving on to the global plan of God as demonstrated by his covenant with Abram, we must evaluate the diversity created by God at the Tower of Babel. It is easy to read the biblical account of the Table of the Nations (Genesis 10) followed by the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) and conclude that diversity was a punishment rather than the creative intent of God. Why does God curse people for trying to establish a unified culture? Are the 5445 living languages in the world<sup>7</sup> a result of our fallen state? We will cover the issue of languages later, but the question does need to be raised early because language is such a part of our cultural distinctiveness from each other.

Stephen Rhodes identifies the problem of the Tower of Babel as people desiring unity against God's intended diversity. God designed diversity – "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" – but humans, "rejecting the pluriform [i.e., diverse] nature of creation that God has willed, the people impose a self-styled unity"<sup>8</sup> resulting in God's wrath. He continues: "Afraid of once again being separated and differentiated from one another, humanity presents God with a common front and a unifying purpose – self-preservation on their own terms."<sup>9</sup>

But if God was dispersing the people for their desire to pursue unity, what is our basis for "united diversity" in the Church? Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, commenting on the Tower of Babel, cites two types of unity. One type, he asserts, is the unity willed by God that all humanity be in covenant relationship with him (see Genesis 9:8-11). The unity suggested by the Tower of Babel is a unity "sought by fearful humanity organized against the purposes of God. This unity attempts to establish a

<sup>7</sup> *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition (Dallas: Wycliffe Bible Translators, 1984), p. xv.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen A. Rhodes. *Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

cultural, human oneness without reference to the threats, promises, or mandates of God. This is a self-made unity in which humanity has a ‘fortress mentality.’ It seeks to survive by its own resources.”<sup>10</sup>

Answer Box # 5

**Biblical reflection**

Read Ephesians 4: 3-6. How do you think that the unity described here differs from the unity that the builders of the Tower of Babel were trying to produce?



**bible study**

The judgment of God on the manufactured, human-centered unity of the people at the Tower of Babel is likewise God’s endorsement of diversity. Rather than allowing them to establish unity on their own terms, God sends them out with linguistic diversity to fulfill his mandate to multiply and fill the earth. Rhodes concludes: “God, the heavenly parent, whose children have been put on their own, grown afraid, and tried to come home, now must push them back into the world.”<sup>11</sup>

**Summary: the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11):**

- Humans disobey the mandate to disperse and “fill the earth” (Genesis 11)
- So God confuses their language and people are scattered (Genesis 11:18)
- Thereby God restores his original intention and plan for humankind
- Dispersion results in the creation of separated tribes, languages, peoples and nations (a foreshadowing of Revelation 5:9 and 7:9)

**Languages and Diversity**

Where does the confusion regarding language fit in this account? Is linguistic diversity in our world a curse? Given that broken relationships follow sin, Hays concludes that the division of peoples by language in Genesis 11 is a consequence of

<sup>10</sup> Walter Brueggemann. Genesis (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 99-100.

<sup>11</sup> Rhodes, Where the Nations Meet, p. 27.

human sin. “Taken together the two chapters [Genesis 10 and 11] hold in tension two opposing aspects: the unity of the tribes and nations as of one blood under God’s blessing and their diversity into many languages under God’s wrath.”<sup>12</sup>

If indeed the diversity of languages is a result of the wrath of God, they also preview the awesome work of God in redemption as it pertains to these languages. Pentecost expresses the word of God going forth in all languages, and the heavenly visions of Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 reflect the multi-lingual family of God.

And now – living in this time between Pentecost and the worship service of Revelation – the expansion of Christianity has occurred largely because the Christian missionaries translated the Word of God into the local or “vernacular” languages.<sup>13</sup> Though the languages might have been God’s wrath at the effort of fallen humans to create a self-styled unity, these same languages today reflect how God is at work to redeem humanity. His covenant with Abram and his commission to the Church reminds us that his love, grace, and blessing is for all peoples and tribes and languages.

### Integration

If all people of all cultures are created in the image of God (Unit 2), and a multi-cultural society was God’s intent (unit 3), then this means that God has revealed something about himself through the people of all cultures on earth. Even if we take into account the corrupting effects of sin on societies and traditions, the common grace of God would teach that – if

Answer Box # 6

In what ways is the use of your “mother tongue” important to you in your daily business, in your church and worship, and in your home? In what ways might you use it to separate yourself from other people?



learning

<sup>12</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> See Lamin Sanneh. Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

God is behind the culture as the Creator, then there's some "fingerprint of God" in every culture.

If all people in all cultures are somehow reflective of the *imago dei* (the image of God), then every person in every culture can teach us something about God's character. The exercise that follows can help you understand and live out this truth.

## Final Assignment



## application

### Final Assignment

- 1) In your own context, identify three other peoples or groups that you would consider ethnically, racially, or culturally different.
- 2) Make an effort to sit and talk with one of these folks, share a meal, and interview them about their uniqueness.
- 3) Now read the entirety of "The Willowbank Report: Report on a Consultation on Gospel and Culture" (see reading section or go to <http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=14322>).

ASSIGNMENT #1: Based on what you learned about the people you met and interacted with from other traditions and cultures, AND based on how "The Willowbank Report" challenged your own thinking about issues related to culture, write a 3-5 page reflection essay.

Hint: In this essay identify two or three things that challenged your thinking about culture (from the report) and two or three positive things that you learned about the culture of the people you met.

## Readings



### **The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture**

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[http://community.gospelcom.net/printable\\_template.jsp?show\\_print=no&backPageID=14322&smpl\\_sakey=44904](http://community.gospelcom.net/printable_template.jsp?show_print=no&backPageID=14322&smpl_sakey=44904)

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### **Introduction**

The process of communicating the gospel cannot be isolated from the human culture from which it comes, or from that in which it is to be proclaimed. This fact constituted one of the preoccupations of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in July 1974. So the Lausanne Committee's Theology and Education Group convened a consultation on this topic to meet in January 1978. It brought 33 theologians, anthropologists, linguists, missionaries and pastors together from all six continents to study "Gospel and Culture." Co-sponsored by the Lausanne Committee's Strategy Working Group, it had four goals:

1. To develop our understanding of the interrelation of the gospel and culture with special reference to God's revelation, to our interpretation and communication of it, and to the response of the hearers in their conversion, their churches and their life style.
2. To reflect critically on the implications of the communication of the gospel cross-culturally.
3. To identify the tools required for more adequate communication of the gospel.
4. To share the fruits of the consultation with Christian leaders in Church and mission.

This Report reflects the content of 17 written papers circulated in advance, summaries of them and reactions to them made during the Consultation, and many viewpoints expressed in plenary and group discussions.

Our program for six days was very full, and we worked at high pressure. In consequence, basic methodological questions about the presuppositions and procedures of theology and the social sciences, and about the proper way to relate them to each other, could not be explored; and there were points at which our discussions clearly reflected this fact. Also, many questions which were raised had to be left on one side, and many particular debates had to be foreclosed as we went along. We are conscious, therefore, that what we say is to some extent provisional, and may need to be sharpened and deepened at various points in the light of future work. In addition, we resort to a number of generalizations; more case studies are needed to see how these relate to specific situations.

Before the Consultation ended, we spent time together working through the draft report and revising it. The final document is a Report, not a Statement or Declaration; so none of us has signed it. But we send it out as a summary of what took place at Willowbank, and we commend it to our fellow Christians throughout the world for study and appropriate action.

### **1. The Biblical Basis of Culture**

"Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he is fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic." (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 10)

God created mankind male and female in his own likeness by endowing them with distinctive human faculties—rational, moral, social, creative and spiritual. He also told them to have children, to fill the earth and to subdue it (Gen. 1:26-28). These divine commands are the origin of human culture. For basic to culture are our control of nature (that is, our environment) and our development of forms of social organization. Insofar as we use our creative powers to obey God's commands, we glorify God, serve others and fulfill an important part of our destiny on earth.

Now however, we are fallen. All our work is accompanied by sweat and struggle (Gen. 3:17-19), and is disfigured by selfishness. So none of our culture is perfect in truth, beauty or goodness. At the heart of every culture—whether we identify this heart as religion or world-view—is an element of self-centeredness, of man's worship of himself. Therefore a culture cannot be brought under the Lordship of Christ without a radical change of allegiance.

For all that, the affirmation that we are made in God's image still stands (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), though the divine likeness has been distorted by sin. And still God expects us to exercise stewardship of the earth and of its creatures (Gen. 9:1-3, 7), and in his common grace makes all persons inventive, resourceful and fruitful in their endeavors. Thus, although Genesis 3 records the fall of humanity, and Genesis 4 Cain's murder of Abel, it is Cain's descendants who are described as the cultural innovators, building cities, breeding livestock, and making musical instruments and metal tools (Gen. 4:17-22).



Many of us evangelical Christians have in the past been too negative towards culture. We do not forget the human fallenness and lostness which call for salvation in Christ. Yet we wish to begin this Report with a positive affirmation of human dignity and human cultural achievement. Wherever human beings develop their social organization, art and science, agriculture and technology, their creativity reflects that of their Creator.

## **2. A Definition of Culture**

Culture is a term which is not easily susceptible of definition. In the broadest sense, it means simply the patterned way in which people do things together. If there is to be any common life and corporate action, there must be agreement, spoken or unspoken, about a great many things. But the term "culture" is not generally used unless the unit concerned is larger than the family, unitary or extended.

Culture implies a measure of homogeneity. But, if the unit is larger than the clan or small tribe, a culture will include within itself a number of subcultures, and subcultures of subcultures, within which a wide variety and diversity is possible. If the variations go beyond a certain limit, a counterculture will have come into being, and this may prove a destructive process.

Culture holds people together over a span of time. It is received from the past, but not by any process of natural inheritance. It has to be learned afresh by each generation. This takes place broadly by a process of absorption from the social environment, especially in the home. In many societies certain elements of the culture are communicated directly in rites of initiation, and by many other forms of deliberate instruction. Action in accordance with the culture is generally at the subconscious level.

This means that an accepted culture covers everything in human life.

At its centre is a world-view, that is, a general understanding of the nature of the universe and of one's place in it. This may be "religious" (concerning God, or gods and spirits, and of our relation to them), or it may express a "secular" concept of reality, as in a Marxist society.

From this basic world-view flow both standards of judgment or values (of what is good in the sense of desirable, of what is acceptable as in accordance with the general will of the community, and of the contraries) and standards of conduct (concerning relations between individuals, between the sexes and the generations, with the community and with those outside the community).

Culture is closely bound up with language, and is expressed in proverbs, myths, folk tales, and various art forms, which become part of the mental furniture of all members of the group. It governs actions undertaken in community—acts of worship or of general welfare; laws and the administration of law; social activities such as dances and games; smaller units of action such as clubs and societies, associations for an immense variety of common purposes.

Cultures are never static; there is a continuous process of change. But this should be so gradual as to take place within the accepted norms; otherwise the culture is disrupted. The worst penalty that can be inflicted on the rebel is exclusion from the culturally defined social community.

Men and women need a unified existence. Participation in a culture is one of the factors which provide them with a sense of belonging. It gives a sense of security, of identity, of dignity, of being part of a larger whole, and of sharing both in the life of past generations and in the expectancy of society for its own future.

Biblical clues to the understanding of the human culture are found in the threefold dimension of people, land, and history, on which the Old Testament focuses attention. The ethnic, the territorial, and the historical (who, where and whence we are) appear there as the triple source of economic, ecological, social and artistic forms of human life in Israel, of the forms of labor and production, and so of wealth and well-being. This model provides a perspective for interpreting all cultures.

Perhaps we may try to condense these various meanings as follows: Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.), and of institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.), which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.

### **3. Culture in the Biblical Revelation**

God's personal self-disclosure in the Bible was given in terms of the hearers' own culture. So we have asked ourselves what light it throws on our task of cross-cultural communication today.

The biblical writers made critical use of whatever cultural material was available to them for the expression of their message. For example, the Old Testament refers several times to the Babylonian sea monster named "Leviathan," while the form of God's "covenant" with his people resembles the ancient Hittite Suzerain's "treaty" with his vassals. The writers also made incidental use of the conceptual imagery of the "three-tiered" universe, though they did not thereby affirm a pre-Copernican cosmology. We do something similar when we talk about the sun "rising" and "setting."

Similarly, New Testament language and thought-forms are steeped in both Jewish and Hellenistic cultures, and Paul seems to have drawn from the vocabulary of Greek philosophy. But the process by which the biblical authors borrowed words and images from their cultural milieu, and used them creatively, was controlled by the Holy Spirit so that they purged them of false or evil implications and thus transformed them into vehicles of truth and goodness. These undoubted facts raise a number of questions with which we have wrestled. We mention five:

### **A. The Nature of Biblical Inspiration**

Is the biblical author's use of the words and ideas of their own culture incompatible with divine inspiration? No. We have taken note of the different literary genres of Scripture, and of the different forms of the process of inspiration which they imply. For instance, there is a broad distinction in form between the work of the prophets, receiving visions and words of the Lord, and historians and writers of letters. Yet the same Spirit uniquely inspired them all. God used the knowledge, experience and cultural background of the authors (though his revelation constantly transcended these), and in each case the result was the same, namely God's Word through human words.

### **B. Form and Meaning**

Every communication has both a meaning (what we want to say) and a form (how we say it). The two - form and meaning - always belong together, in the Bible as well as in other books and utterances. How then should a message be translated from one language into another?

A literal translation of the form ("formal correspondence") may conceal or distort the meaning. In such cases, the better way is to find in the other language an expression which makes an equivalent impact on the hearers now as did the original. This may involve changing the form in order to preserve the meaning. This is called "dynamic equivalence."

Consider, for example, the RSV translation of Rom. 1:17, which states that in the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith." This gives a word-for-word rendering of the original Greek, that is, a "formal correspondence" translation. But it leaves the meaning of the Greek words "righteousness" and "from faith to faith" unclear. A translation such as TEV—"the gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end"—abandons the principle of one-to-one correspondence between Greek and English words; but it expresses the meaning of the original sentence more adequately. The attempt to produce such a "dynamic equivalence" translation may well bring the translator to a deeper understanding of Scripture, as well as make the text more meaningful to people of another language.

Some of the biblical forms (words, images, metaphors) should be retained, however, because they are important recurring symbols in Scripture (e.g., cross, lamb, or cup). While retaining the form, the translators will try to bring out the meaning. For example, in the TEV rendering of Mark 14:36—"take this cup of suffering away from me"—the form (i.e., the "cup" image) is retained, but the words "of suffering" are added to clarify the meaning.

Writing in Greek, the New Testament authors used words that had a long history in the secular world, but they invested them with Christian meanings, as when John referred to Jesus as "the Logos." It was a perilous procedure, because "logos" had a wide variety of meanings in Greek literature and philosophy, and non-Christian associations doubtlessly clung to the word. So John set the title within a teaching context, affirming that the Logos was in the beginning, was with God, was God, was the agent of creation, was the light and life of men, and became a human

being (John 1: 1-14). Similarly, some Indian Christians have taken the risk of borrowing the Sanskrit word "avatar" (descent), used in Hinduism for the so-called "incarnations" of Vishnu, and applied it, with careful explanatory safeguards, to the unique incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. But others have refused to do so, on the ground that no safeguards are adequate to prevent misinterpretation.

### **C. The Normative Nature of Scripture**

The Lausanne Covenant declares that Scripture is "without error in all that it affirms" (paragraph 2). This lays upon us the serious exegetical task of discerning exactly what Scripture is affirming. The essential meaning of the biblical message must at all costs be retained. Though some of the original forms in which this meaning was expressed may be changed for the sake of cross-cultural communication, we believe that they too have a certain normative quality. For God himself chose them as wholly appropriate vehicles of his revelation. So each fresh formulation and explanation in every generation and culture must be checked for faithfulness by referring back to the original.

### **D. The Cultural Conditioning of Scripture**

We have not been able to devote as much time as we would have liked to the problem of the cultural conditioning of Scripture. We are agreed that some biblical commands (e.g., regarding the veiling of women in public and washing one another's feet) refer to cultural customs now obsolete in many parts of the world. Faced by such texts, we believe the right response is neither a slavishly literal obedience nor an irresponsible disregard, but rather first a critical discernment of the text's inner meaning and then a translation of it into our own culture. For example, the inner meaning of the command to wash each other's feet is that mutual love must express itself in humble service. So in some cultures we may clean each other's shoes instead. We are clear that the purpose of such "cultural transposition" is not to avoid obedience but rather to make it contemporary and authentic.

The controversial question of the status of women was not debated at our Consultation. But we acknowledge the need to search for an understanding which attempts with integrity to do justice to all the biblical teaching, and which sees the relations between men and women as being both rooted in the created order and at the same time wonderfully transformed by the new order which Jesus introduced.

### **E. The Continuing Work of the Holy Spirit**

Does our emphasis on the finality and permanent normativeness of Scripture mean that we think the Holy Spirit has now ceased to operate? No, indeed not. But the nature of his teaching ministry has changed. We believe that his work of "inspiration" is done, in the sense that the canon of Scripture is closed, but that his work of "illumination" continues both in every conversion (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:6) and in the life of the Christian and the church. So we need

constantly to pray that he will enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we may know the fullness of God's purpose for us (Eph. 1:17ff) and may be not timorous but courageous in making decisions and undertaking fresh tasks today. We have been made aware that the experience of the Holy Spirit revealing the application of God's truth to personal and church life is often less vivid than it should be; we all need a more sensitive openness at this point.

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. The commands of Genesis 1:26-28 are sometimes referred to as "the cultural mandate" which God gave to mankind. How responsibly is it being fulfilled today?
2. In the light of the definition of culture in Section 2, what are the main distinctive elements of your own culture?
3. If you know two languages, make up a sentence in one and then try to find a "dynamic equivalence" translation of it into the other.
4. Give other examples of "cultural transposition" (see 3d), which preserve the biblical text's "inner meaning" but transpose it into your own culture.

#### **4. Understanding God's Word Today**

The cultural factor is present not only in God's self-revelation in Scripture, but also in our interpretation of it. To this subject we now turn. All Christians are concerned to understand God's Word, but there are different ways of trying to do so.

##### **A. Traditional Approaches**

The commonest way is to come straight to the words of the biblical text, and to study them without any awareness that the writer's cultural context differs from the reader's. The reader interprets the text as if it had been written in his own language, culture and time.

We recognize that much Scripture can be read and understood in this way, especially if the translation is good. For God intended his word for ordinary people; it is not to be regarded as the preserve of scholars; the central truths of salvation are plain for all to see; Scripture is "useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living" (2 Tim. 3:16, TEV); and the Holy Spirit has been given to be our teacher.

The weakness of this "popular" approach, however, is that it does not seek first to understand the text in its original context; and, therefore, it runs the risk of missing the real meaning God intends and of substituting another.

A second approach takes with due seriousness the original historical and cultural context. It seeks also to discover what the text meant in its original language, and how it relates to the rest of Scripture. All this is an essential

discipline because God spoke his word to a particular people in a particular context and time. So our understanding of God's message will grow when we probe deeply into these matters.

The weakness of this "historical" approach, however, is that it fails to consider what Scripture may be saying to the contemporary reader. It stops short at the meaning of the Bible in its own time and culture. It is thus liable to analyze the text without applying it, and to acquire academic knowledge without obedience. The interpreter may also tend to exaggerate the possibility of complete objectivity and ignore his or her own cultural presuppositions.

### **B. The Contextual Approach**

A third approach begins by combining the positive elements of both the "popular" and the "historical" approaches. From the "historical" it takes the necessity of studying the original context and language, and from the "popular" the necessity of listening to God's Word and obeying it. But it goes further than this. It takes seriously the cultural context of the contemporary readers as well as of the biblical text, and recognizes that a dialogue must develop between the two.

It is the need for this dynamic interplay between text and interpreters which we wish to emphasize. Today's readers cannot come to the text in a personal vacuum, and should not try to. Instead, they should come with an awareness of concerns stemming from their cultural background, personal situation, and responsibility to others. These concerns will influence the questions which are put to the Scriptures. What is received back, however, will not be answers only, but more questions. As we address Scripture, Scripture addresses us. We find that our culturally conditioned presuppositions are being challenged and our questions corrected. In fact, we are compelled to reformulate our previous questions and to ask fresh ones. So the living interaction proceeds.

In this process of interaction our knowledge of God and our response to his will are continuously being deepened. The more we come to know him, the greater our responsibility becomes to obey him in our own situation, and the more we respond obediently, the more he makes himself known.

It is this continuous growth in knowledge, love and obedience which is the purpose and profit of the "contextual" approach. Out of the context in which his word was originally given, we hear God speaking to us in our contemporary context, and we find it a transforming experience. This process is a kind of upward spiral in which Scripture remains always central and normative.

### **C. The Learning Community**

We wish to emphasize that the task of understanding the Scriptures belongs not just to individuals but to the whole Christian community, seen as both a contemporary and a historical fellowship.

There are many ways in which the local or regional church can come to discern God's will in its own culture today. Christ still appoints pastors and teachers in his church. And in answer to expectant prayer he speaks to his people, especially through the preaching of his word in the context of worship. In addition, there is a place for "teaching and admonishing one another" (Col. 3:16) both in group Bible studies and in consulting sister churches, as well as for the quiet listening to the voice of God in the Scriptures, which is an indispensable element in the believer's Christian life.

The church is also a historical fellowship and has received from the past a rich inheritance of Christian theology, liturgy and devotion. No group of believers can disregard this heritage without risking spiritual impoverishment. At the same time, this tradition must not be received uncritically, whether it comes in the form of a set of denominational distinctives or in any other way, but rather be tested by the Scripture it claims to expound. Nor must it be imposed on any church, but rather be made available to those who can use it as a valuable resource material, as a counterbalance to the spirit of independence, and as a link with the universal church.

Thus the Holy Spirit instructs his people through a variety of teachers of both the past and the present. We need each other. It is only "with all the saints" that we can begin to comprehend the full dimensions of God's love (Eph. 3:18, 19). The Spirit "illuminates the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its (that is, the Scripture's) truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole church ever more of the many colored wisdom of God" (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 2, echoing Eph. 3: 10).

#### **D. The Silences of Scripture**

We have also considered the problem of Scripture silences, that is, those areas of doctrine and ethics on which the Bible has nothing explicit to say. Written in the ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman world, Scripture does not address itself directly, for example, to Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam today, or to Marxist socio-economic theory, or modern technology. Nevertheless, we believe it is right for the church guided by the Holy Spirit to search the Scriptures for precedents and principles which will enable it to develop the mind of the Lord Christ and so be able to make authentically Christian decisions. This process will go on most fruitfully within the believing community as it worships God and engages in active obedience in the world. We repeat that Christian obedience is as much a prelude to understanding as a consequence of it.

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. Can you recall any examples of how either of the two "traditional approaches" to Bible reading had led you astray?

2. Choose a well-known text like Matthew 6:24-34 (anxiety and ambition) or Luke 10:25-38 (the Good Samaritan and use the "contextual approach" in studying it. Let a dialogue develop between you and the text, as you question it and it questions you. Write down the stages of the interaction.
3. Read Sections 3e and 4c, and then discuss practical ways of seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit today.

## **5. The Content and Communication of the Gospel**

Having thought about God's communication of the gospel to us in Scripture, we now come to the very heart of our concern, our responsibility to communicate it to others, that is, to evangelize. But before we consider the communication of the gospel, we have to consider the content of the gospel which is to be communicated. For "to evangelize is to spread the good news" (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 4). Therefore there can be no evangelism without the evangel.

### **A. The Bible and the Gospel**

The gospel is to be found in the Bible. In fact, there is a sense in which the whole Bible is gospel, from Genesis to Revelation. For its overriding purpose throughout is to bear witness to Christ, to proclaim the good news that he is lifegiver and Lord, and to persuade people to trust in him (e.g., John 5:39, 40; 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:15).

The Bible proclaims the gospel story in many forms. The gospel is like a multi-faceted diamond, with different aspects that appeal to different people in different cultures. It has depths we have not fathomed. It defies every attempt to reduce it to a neat formulation.

### **B. The Heart of the Gospel**

Nevertheless, it is important to identify what is at the heart of the gospel. We recognize as central the themes of God as Creator, the universality of sin, Jesus Christ as Son of God, Lord of all, and Savior through his atoning death and risen life, the necessity of conversion, the coming of the Holy Spirit and his transforming power, the fellowship and mission of the Christian church, and the hope of Christ's return.

While these are basic elements of the gospel, it is necessary to add that no theological statement is culture-free. Therefore, all theological formulations must be judged by the Bible itself, which stands above them all. Their value must be judged by their faithfulness to it as well as by the relevance with which they apply its message to their own culture. In our desire to communicate the gospel effectively, we are often made aware of those elements in it which people dislike. For example, the cross has always been both an offense to the proud and folly to the wise. But Paul did not on that account eliminate it from his message. On the contrary, he continued to proclaim it, with faithfulness and at the risk



of persecution, confident that Christ crucified is the wisdom and the power of God. We too, although concerned to contextualize our message and remove from it all unnecessary offense, must resist the temptation to accommodate it to human pride or prejudice. It has been given to us. Our responsibility is not to edit it but to proclaim it.

### **C. Cultural Barriers to the Communication of the Gospel**

No Christian witness can hope to communicate the gospel if he or she ignores the cultural factor. This is particularly true in the case of missionaries. For they are themselves the product of one culture and go to people who are the products of another. So inevitably they are involved in cross-cultural communication, with all its exciting challenge and exacting demand. Two main problems face them.

Sometimes people resist the gospel not because they think it false but because they perceive it as a threat to their culture, especially the fabric of their society, and their national or tribal solidarity. To some extent this cannot be avoided. Jesus Christ is a disturber as well as a peacemaker. He is Lord, and demands our total allegiance. Thus, some first-century Jews saw the gospel as undermining Judaism and accused Paul of "teaching men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place," i.e., the temple (Acts 21:28). Similarly, some first-century Romans feared for the stability of the state, since in their view the Christian missionaries, by saying that "there is another King, Jesus," were being disloyal to Caesar and advocating customs which it was not lawful for Romans to practice (Acts 16:21; 17:7). Still today Jesus challenges many of the cherished beliefs and customs of every culture and society.

At the same time, there are features of every culture which are not incompatible with the lordship of Christ, and which therefore need not be threatened or discarded, but rather preserved and transformed. Messengers of the gospel need to develop a deep understanding of the local culture, and a genuine appreciation of it. Only then will they be able to perceive whether the resistance is to some unavoidable challenge of Jesus Christ or to some threat to the culture which, whether imaginary or real, is not necessary.

The other problem is that the gospel is often presented to people in alien cultural forms. Then the missionaries are resented and their message rejected because their work is seen not as an attempt to evangelize but as an attempt to impose their own customs and way of life. Where missionaries bring with them foreign ways of thinking and behaving, or attitudes of racial superiority, paternalism, or preoccupation with material things, effective communication will be precluded.

Sometimes these two cultural blunders are committed together, and messengers of the gospel are guilty of a cultural imperialism which both undermines the local culture unnecessarily and seeks to impose an alien culture instead. Some of the missionaries who accompanied the Catholic *conquistadores* of Latin America and the Protestant colonizers of Africa and Asia are historical examples of this double mistake. By contrast, the apostle Paul remains the supreme example of one whom Jesus Christ first stripped of pride in his own cultural privileges (Phil. 3:4-9) and then

taught to adapt to the cultures of others, making himself their slave and becoming "all things to all men" in order by all means to save some (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

#### **D. Cultural Sensitivity in Communicating the Gospel**

Sensitive cross-cultural witnesses will not arrive at their sphere of service with a pre-packaged gospel. They must have a clear grasp of the "given" truth of the gospel. But they will fail to communicate successfully if they try to impose this on people without reference to their own cultural situation and that of the people to whom they go. It is only by active, loving engagement with the local people, thinking in their thought patterns, understanding their world-view, listening to their questions, and feeling their burdens, that the whole believing community (of which the missionary is a part) will be able to respond to their need. By common prayer, thought and heartsearching, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, expatriate and local believers may learn together how to present Christ and contextualize the gospel with an equal degree of faithfulness and relevance. We are not claiming that it will be easy, although some Third World cultures have a natural affinity to biblical culture. But we believe that fresh creative understandings do emerge when the Spirit-led believing community is listening and reacting sensitively to both the truth of Scripture and the needs of the world.

#### **E. Christian Witness in the Islamic World**

Concern was expressed that insufficient attention had been given at our Consultation to the distinctive problems of the Christian mission in the Islamic world, though there are approximately 600 million Muslims today. On the one hand, a resurgence of Islamic faith and mission is taking place in many lands; on the other hand, there is a new openness to the Gospel in a number of communities which are weakening their ties to traditional Islamic culture.

There is a need to recognize the distinctive features of Islam which provide a unique opportunity for Christian witness. Although there are in Islam elements which are incompatible with the gospel, there are also elements with a degree of what has been called "convertibility." For instance, our Christian understanding of God, expressed in Luther's great cry related to justification, "Let God be God," might well serve as an inclusive definition of Islam. The Islamic faith in divine unity, the emphasis on man's obligation to render God a right worship, and the utter rejection of idolatry could also be regarded as being in line with God's purpose for human life as revealed in Jesus Christ. Contemporary Christian witnesses should learn humbly and expectantly to identify, appreciate and illuminate these and other values. They should also wrestle for the transformation—and, where possible, integration—of all that is relevant in Islamic worship, prayer, fasting, art, architecture, and calligraphy.

All this proceeds only within a realistic appreciation of the present situation of the Islamic countries characterized by technological development and secularization. The social liabilities of new wealth and traditional poverty, the tensions of political independence, and the tragic Palestinian dispersion and frustration—all of these afford areas of

relevant Christian witness. The last has given birth to much passionate poetry, one note in which is the paradigm of the suffering Jesus. These and other elements call for a new Christian sensitivity and a real awareness of the habits of introversion under which the church has for so long labored in the Middle East. Elsewhere, not least in sub-Saharan Africa, attitudes are more flexible and possibilities more fluid.

In order to fulfill more adequately the missionary challenge, fresh attempts are needed to develop ways of association of believers and seekers, if need be outside the traditional church forms. The crux of a lively, evangelizing sense of responsibility towards Muslims will always be the quality of Christian personal and corporate discipleship and the constraining love of Christ.

### **F. An Expectation of Results**

Messengers of the gospel who have proved in their own experience that it is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16) rightly expect it to be so in the experience of others also. We confess that sometimes, just as a Gentile centurion's faith put to shame the unbelief of Israel in Jesus' day (Matt. 8:10), so today the believing expectancy of Christians in other cultures sometimes shows up the missionary's lack of faith. So we remind ourselves of God's promises through Abraham's posterity to bless all the families of the earth and through the gospel to save those who believe (Gen. 12:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:21). It is on the basis of these and many other promises that we remind all messengers of the gospel, including ourselves, to look to God to save people and to build his church.

At the same time, we do not forget our Lord's warnings of opposition and suffering. Human hearts are hard. People do not always embrace the gospel, even when the communication is blameless in technique and the communicator in character. Our Lord himself was fully at home in the culture in which he preached, yet he and his message were despised and rejected, and his Parable of the Sower seems to warn us that most of the good seed we sow will not bear fruit. There is a mystery here we cannot fathom. "The Spirit blows where he wills" (John 3:8). While seeking to communicate the gospel with care, faithfulness and zeal, we leave the results to God in humility.

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. In Section 5a and 5b the Report refuses to give a "neat formulation" of the gospel, but identifies its "heart." Would you want to add to these "central themes," or subtract from them, or amplify them?
2. Clarify the "two cultural blunders" of 5c. Can you think of examples? How can such mistakes be avoided?
3. Think of the cultural situation of the people you are wanting to win for Christ. What would "cultural sensitivity" mean in your case?

## **6. Wanted: Humble Messengers of the Gospel!**

We believe that the principal key to persuasive Christian communication is to be found in the communicators themselves and what kind of people they are. It should go without saying that they need to be people of Christian faith, love, and holiness. That is, they must have a personal and growing experience of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, so that the image of Jesus Christ is ever more clearly seen in their character and attitudes.

Above all else we desire to see in them, and especially in ourselves, "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1), in other words, the humble sensitivity of Christ's love. So important do we believe this to be that we are devoting the whole of this section of our Report to it. Moreover, since, we have no wish to point the finger at anybody but ourselves, we shall use the first person plural throughout. First, we give an analysis of Christian humility in a missionary situation, and secondly, we turn to the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ as the model we desire by his grace to follow.

### **A. An Analysis of Missionary Humility**

First, there is the humility to acknowledge the problem which culture presents, and not to avoid or over-simplify it. As we have seen, different cultures have strongly influenced the biblical revelation, ourselves, and the people to whom we go. As a result, we have several personal limitations in communicating the gospel. For we are prisoners (consciously or unconsciously) of our own culture, and our grasp of the cultures both of the Bible and of the country in which we serve is very imperfect. It is the interaction between all these cultures which constitutes the problem of communication; it humbles all who wrestle with it.

Secondly, there is the humility to take the trouble to understand and appreciate the culture of those to whom we go. It is this desire which leads naturally into that true dialogue "whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand" (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 4). We repent of the ignorance which assumes that we have all the answers and that our only role is to teach. We have very much to learn. We repent also of judgmental attitudes. We know we should never condemn or despise another culture, but rather respect it. We advocate neither the arrogance which imposes our culture on others, nor the syncretism which mixes the gospel with cultural elements incompatible with it, but rather a humble sharing of the good news—made possible by the mutual respect of a genuine friendship.

Thirdly, there is the humility to begin our communication where people actually are and not where we would like them to be. This is what we see Jesus doing, and we desire to follow his example. Too often we have ignored people's fears and frustrations, their pains and preoccupations, and their hunger, poverty, deprivation or oppression, in fact their "felt needs," and have been too slow to rejoice or to weep with them. We acknowledge that these "felt needs" may sometimes be symptoms of deeper needs which are not immediately felt or recognized by the people. A doctor does not necessarily accept a patient's self-diagnosis. Nevertheless, we see the need to begin where people are, but not to

stop there. We accept our responsibility gently and patiently to lead them on to see themselves, as we see ourselves, as rebels to whom the gospel directly speaks with a message of pardon and hope. To begin where people are not is to share an irrelevant message; to stay where people are and never lead them on to the fullness of God's good news, is to share a truncated gospel. The humble sensitivity of love will avoid both errors.

Fourthly, there is the humility to recognize that even the most gifted, dedicated and experienced missionary can seldom communicate the gospel in another language or culture as effectively as a trained local Christian. This fact has been acknowledged in recent years by the Bible Societies, whose policy has changed from publishing translations by missionaries (with help from local people) to training mother-tongue specialists to do the translating. Only local Christians can answer the questions, "God, how would you say this in our language?" and "God, what will obedience to you mean in our culture?" Therefore, whether we are translating the Bible or communicating the gospel, local Christians are indispensable. It is they who must assume the responsibility to contextualize the gospel in their own languages and cultures. Would-be cross-cultural witnesses are not on that account necessarily superfluous; but we shall be welcome only if we are humble enough to see good communication as a team enterprise, in which all believers collaborate as partners.

Fifthly, there is the humility to trust in the Holy Spirit of God, who is always the chief communicator, who alone opens the eyes of the blind and brings people to new birth. "Without his witness, ours is futile" (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 14).

### **B. The Incarnation as a Model for Christian Witness**

We have met for our Consultation within a few days of Christmas, which might be called the most spectacular instance of cultural identification in the history of mankind, since by his Incarnation the Son became a first century Galilean Jew.

We have also remembered that Jesus intended his people's mission in the world to be modeled on his own. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you," he said (John 20:21; cf. 17:18). We have asked ourselves, therefore, about the implications of the Incarnation for all of us. The question is of special concern to cross-cultural witnesses, whatever country they go to, although we have thought particularly of those from the West who serve in the Third World.

Meditating on Philippians 2, we have seen that the self-humbling of Christ began in his mind: "he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." So we are commanded to let his mind be in us, and in humility of mind to "count" others better or more important than ourselves. This mind or "perspective" of Christ is a recognition of the infinite worth of human beings and of the privilege it is to serve them. Those witnesses who have the mind of Christ will have a profound respect for the people they serve, and for their cultures.

Two verbs then indicate the action to which the mind of Christ led him: "he emptied himself ... he humbled himself..." The first speaks of sacrifice (what he renounced) and the second of service, even slavery (how he identified himself with us and put himself at our disposal). We have tried to think what these two actions meant for him, and might mean for cross-cultural witnesses.

We began with his *renunciation*. First, the renunciation of status. "Mild he laid his glory by," we have been singing at Christmas. Because we cannot conceive what his eternal glory was like, it is impossible to grasp the greatness of his self-emptying. But certainly he surrendered the rights, privileges, and powers which he enjoyed as God's Son. "Status" and "status symbols" mean much in the modern world, but are incongruous in missionaries. We believe that wherever missionaries are they should not be in control or work alone, but always with—and preferably under—local Christians who can advise and even direct them. And whatever the missionaries' responsibility may be they should express attitudes "not of domination but of service" (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 11).

Next the renunciation of independence. We have looked at Jesus—asking a Samaritan woman for water, living in other people's homes and on other people's money because he had none of his own, being lent a boat, a donkey, an upper room, and even being buried in a borrowed tomb. Similarly, cross-cultural messengers, especially during their first years of service, need to learn dependence on others.

Thirdly, the renunciation of immunity. Jesus exposed himself to temptation, sorrow, limitation, economic need, and pain. So the missionary should expect to become vulnerable to new temptations, dangers and diseases, a strange climate, an unaccustomed loneliness, and possibly death.

Turning from the theme of renunciation to that of *identification*, we have marveled afresh at the completeness of our Savior's identification with us, particularly as this is taught in the Letter to the Hebrews. He shared our "flesh and blood," was tempted as we are, learned obedience through his sufferings and tasted death for us (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15; 5:8). During his public ministry Jesus befriended the poor and the powerless, healed the sick, fed the hungry, touched untouchables, and risked his reputation by associating with those whom society rejected.

The extent to which we identify ourselves with the people to whom we go is a matter of controversy. Certainly it must include mastering their language, immersing ourselves in their culture, learning to think as they think, feel as they feel, do as they do. At the socio-economic level we do not believe that we should "go native," principally because a foreigner's attempt to do this may not be seen as authentic but as play-acting. But neither do we think there should be a conspicuous disparity between our life style and that of the people around us. In between these extremes, we see the possibility of developing a standard of living which expresses the kind of love which cares and shares, and which finds it natural to exchange hospitality with others on a basis of reciprocity, without embarrassment. A searching test of identification is how far we feel that we belong to the people, and - still more - how far they feel that we belong to them.

Do we participate naturally in days of national or tribal thanksgiving or sorrow? Do we groan with them in the

oppression which they suffer and join them in their quest for justice and freedom? If the country is struck by earthquake or engulfed in civil war, is our instinct to stay and suffer with the people we love, or to fly home?

Although Jesus identified himself completely with us, he did not lose his own identity. He remained himself. "He came down from heaven ... and was made man" (Nicene Creed); yet in becoming one of us he did not cease to be God. Just so, "Christ's evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity" (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 10). The Incarnation teaches identification without loss of identity. We believe that true self-sacrifice leads to true self-discovery. In humble service there is abundant joy.

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. If the main key to communication lies in the communicators, what sort of people should they be?
2. Give your own analysis of the humility which all Christian witnesses should have. Where would you put your emphasis?
3. Since the Incarnation involved both "renunciation" and "identification," it was obviously very costly for Jesus. What would be the cost of "incarnation evangelism" today?

## **7. Conversion and Culture**

We have thought of the relations between conversion and culture in two ways. First, what effect does conversion have on the cultural situation of converts, the ways they think and act, and their attitudes to their social environment?

Secondly, what effect has our culture had on our own understanding of conversion? Both questions are important. But we want to say at once that elements in our traditional evangelical view of conversion are more cultural than biblical and need to be challenged. Too often we have thought of conversion as a crisis, instead of as a process as well; or we have viewed conversion as a largely private experience, forgetting its consequent public and social responsibilities.

### **A. The Radical Nature of Conversion**

We are convinced that the radical nature of conversion to Jesus Christ needs to be reaffirmed in the contemporary church. For we are always in danger of trivializing it, as if it were no more than a surface change, and a self-reformation at that. But the New Testament authors write of it as the outward expression of a regeneration or new birth by God's Spirit, a recreation, and resurrection from spiritual death. The concept of resurrection seems to be particularly important. For the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was the beginning of the new creation of God, and by God's grace through union with Christ we have shared in this resurrection. We have therefore entered the new age and have already tasted its powers and its joys. This is the eschatological dimension of Christian conversion.

Conversion is an integral part of the Great Renewal which God has begun, and which will be brought to a triumphant climax when Christ comes in his glory.

Conversion involves as well a break with the past so complete that it is spoken of in terms of death. We have been crucified with Christ. Through his cross we have died to the godless world, its outlook, and its standards. We have also "put off" like a soiled garment the old Adam, our former and fallen humanity. And Jesus warned us that this turning away from the past may involve painful sacrifices, even the loss of family and possessions (e.g., Lk. 14:25ff).

It is vital to keep together these negative and positive aspects of conversion, the death and the resurrection, the putting off of the old and the putting on of the new. For we who died are alive again, but alive now with a new life lived in, for, and under Christ.

### **B. The Lordship of Jesus Christ**

We are clear that the fundamental meaning of conversion is a change of allegiance. Other gods and lords—idolatries every one—previously ruled over us. But now Jesus Christ is Lord. The governing principle of the converted life is that it is lived under the lordship of Christ or (for it comes to the same thing) in the Kingdom of God. His authority over us is total. So this new and liberating allegiance leads inevitably to a reappraisal of every aspect of our lives and in particular of our world-view, our behavior, and our relationships.

First, our world-view. We are agreed that the heart of every culture is a "religion" of some kind, even if it is an irreligious religion like Marxism. "Culture is religion made visible" (J. H. Bavinck). And "religion" is a whole cluster of basic beliefs and values, which is the reason why for our purposes we are using "world-view" as an equivalent expression. True conversion to Christ is bound, therefore, to strike at the heart of our cultural inheritance. Jesus Christ insists on dislodging from the centre of our world whatever idol previously reigned there, and occupying the throne himself. This is the radical change of allegiance which constitutes conversion, or at least its beginning. Then once Christ has taken his rightful place, everything else starts shifting. The shock waves flow from the centre to the circumference. The convert has to rethink his or her fundamental convictions. This is *metanoia*, "repentance" viewed as a change of mind, the replacement of "the mind of the flesh" by "the mind of Christ." Of course, the development of an integrated Christian world-view may take a lifetime, but it is there in essence from the start. If it does grow, the explosive consequences cannot be predicted.

Secondly, our behavior. The lordship of Jesus challenges our moral standards and whole ethical life style. Strictly speaking, this is not "repentance" but rather the "fruit that befits repentance" (Matt. 3:8), the change of conduct which issues from a change of outlook. Both our minds and our wills must submit to the obedience of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5; Matt. 11:29, 30; John 13:13).



Listening to case studies of conversion we have been impressed by the primacy of love in the new convert's experience. Conversion delivers both from the inversion which is too preoccupied with self to bother about other people and from the fatalism which considers it impossible to help them. Conversion is spurious if it does not liberate us to love.

Thirdly, our relationships. Although the convert should do his utmost to avoid a break with nation, tribe and family, sometimes painful conflicts arise. It is clear also that conversion involves a transfer from one community to another, that is, from fallen humanity to God's new humanity. It happened from the very beginning on the Day of Pentecost: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation," Peter appealed. So those who received his message were baptized into the new society, devoted themselves to the new fellowship, and found that the Lord continued to add to their numbers daily (Acts 2:40-47). At the same time, their "transfer" from one group to another meant rather that they were spiritually distinct than that they were socially segregated. They did not abandon the world. On the contrary, they gained a new commitment to it, and went out into it to witness and to serve.

All of us should cherish great expectations of such radical conversions in our day, involving converts in a new mind, a new way of life, a new community, and a new mission, all under the lordship of Christ. Yet now we feel the need to make several qualifications.

### **C. The Convert and His Culture**

Conversion should not "de-culturize" a convert. True, as we have seen, the Lord Jesus now holds his or her allegiance, and everything in the cultural context must come under his Lord's scrutiny. This applies to every culture, not just to those of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or animistic cultures but also to the increasingly materialistic culture of the West. The critique may lead to a collision, as elements of the culture come under the judgment of Christ and have to be rejected. At this point, on the rebound, the convert may try to adopt the evangelist's culture instead; the attempt should be firmly but gently resisted.

The convert should be encouraged to see his or her relation to the past as a combination of rupture and continuity. However much new converts feel they need to renounce for the sake of Christ, they are still the same people with the same heritage and the same family. "Conversion does not unmake; it remakes." It is always tragic, though in some situations it is unavoidable, when a person's conversion to Christ is interpreted by others as treachery to his or her own cultural origins. If possible, in spite of the conflicts with their own culture, new converts should seek to identify with their culture's joys, hopes, pains, and struggles.

Case histories show that converts often pass through three stages: (1) "rejection" (when they see themselves as "new persons in Christ" and repudiate everything associated with their past); (2) "accommodation" (when they discover their ethnic and cultural heritage, with the temptation to compromise the new-found Christian faith in relation to their

heritage); and (3) "the re-establishment of identity" (when either the rejection of the past or the accommodation to it may increase, or preferably, they may grow into a balanced self-awareness in Christ and in culture).

#### **D. The Power Encounter**

"Jesus is Lord" means more than that he is Lord of the individual convert's world-view, standards and relationships, and more even than that he is Lord of culture. It means that he is Lord of the powers, having been exalted by the Father to universal sovereignty, principalities and powers having been made subject to him (I Peter. 3:22). A number of us, especially those from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, have spoken both of the reality of evil powers and of the necessity to demonstrate the supremacy of Jesus over them. For conversion involves a power encounter. People give their allegiance to Christ when they see that his power is superior to magic and voodoo, the curses and blessings of witch doctors, and the malevolence of evil spirits, and that his salvation is a real liberation from the power of evil and death.

Of course, some are questioning today whether a belief in spirits is compatible with our modern scientific understanding of the universe. We wish to affirm, therefore, against the mechanistic myth on which the typical Western world-view rests, the reality of demonic intelligences which are concerned by all means, overt and covert, to discredit Jesus Christ and keep people from coming to him. We think it vital in evangelism in all cultures to teach the reality and hostility of demonic powers, and to proclaim that God has exalted Christ as Lord of all and that Christ, who really does possess all power, however we may fail to acknowledge this, can (as we proclaim him) break through any world-view in any mind to make his lordship known and bring about a radical change of heart and outlook.

We wish to emphasize that the power belongs to Christ. Power in human hands is always dangerous. We have called to mind the recurring theme of Paul's two letters to the Corinthians—that God's power, which is clearly seen in the cross of Christ, operates through human weakness (e.g., I Cor. 1:18-2:5; 2 Cor. 4:7; 12:9,10). Worldly people worship power; Christians who have it know its perils. It is better to be weak, for then we are strong. We specially honor the Christian martyrs of recent days (e.g., in East Africa) who have renounced the way of power, and followed the way of the cross.

#### **E. Individual and Group Conversions**

Conversion should not be conceived as being invariably and only an individual experience, although that has been the pattern of Western expectation for many years. On the contrary, the covenant theme of the Old Testament and the household baptisms of the New should lead us to desire, work for, and expect both family and group conversions. Much important research has been undertaken in recent years into "people movements" from both theological and sociological perspectives. Theologically, we recognize the biblical emphasis on the solidarity of each

*ethnos*, i.e., nation or people. Sociologically, we recognize that each society is composed of a variety of subgroups, subcultures or homogeneous units. It is evident that people receive the gospel most readily when it is presented to them in a manner which is appropriate—and not alien—to their culture, and when they can respond to it with and among their own people. Different societies have different procedures for making group decisions, e.g., by consensus, by the head of the family, or by a group of elders. We recognize the validity of the corporate dimension of conversion as part of the total process, as well as the necessity for each member of the group ultimately to share in it personally.

### **F. Is Conversion Sudden or Gradual?**

Conversion is often more gradual than traditional evangelical teaching has allowed. True, this may be only a dispute about words. Justification and regeneration, the one conveying a new status and the other a new life, are works of God and instantaneous, although we are not necessarily aware when they take place. Conversion, on the other hand, is our own action (moved by God's grace) of turning to God in penitence and faith. Although it may include a conscious crisis, it is often slow and sometimes laborious. Seen against the background of the Hebrew and Greek vocabulary, conversion is in essence a turning to God, which continues as all areas of life are brought in increasingly radical ways under the lordship of Christ. Conversion involves the Christian's complete transformation and total renewal in mind and character according to the likeness of Christ (Rom. 12:1, 2).

This progress does not always take place, however. We have given some thought to the sad phenomena called "backsliding" (a quiet slipping away from Christ) and "apostasy" (an open repudiation of him). These have a variety of causes. Some people turn away from Christ when they become disenchanted with the church; others capitulate to the pressures of secularism or of their former culture. These facts challenge us both to proclaim a full gospel and to be more conscientious in nurturing converts in the faith and in training them for service.

One member of our Consultation has described his experience in terms of turning first to Christ (receiving his salvation and acknowledging his lordship), secondly to culture (rediscovering his natural origins and identity), and thirdly to the world (accepting the mission on which Christ sends him). We agree that conversion is often a complex experience, and that the biblical language of "turning" is used in different ways and contexts. At the same time, we all emphasize that personal commitment to Jesus Christ is foundational. In him alone we find salvation, new life, and personal identity. Conversion must also result in new attitudes and relationships, and lead to a responsible involvement in our church, our culture, and our world. Finally, conversion is a journey, a pilgrimage, with ever-new challenges, decisions, and returnings to the Lord as the constant point of reference, until he comes.

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. Distinguish between "regeneration" and "conversion" according to the New Testament.

2. "Jesus is Lord." What does this mean for you in your own culture? See Section 7b and 7d. What are the elements of your cultural heritage which you feel (a) you must, and (b) you need not, renounce for the sake of Christ?
3. What is sudden and what is (or may be) gradual in Christian conversion?

## **8. Church and Culture**

In the process of church formation, as in the communication and reception of the gospel, the question of culture is vital. If the gospel must be contextualized, so must the church. Indeed, the sub-title of our Consultation has been "the contextualization of Word and Church in a missionary situation."

### **A. Older, Traditional Approaches**

During the missionary expansion of the early part of the 19th century, it was generally assumed that churches "on the mission field" would be modeled on churches "at home." The tendency was to produce almost exact replicas. Gothic architecture, prayer book liturgies, clerical dress, musical instruments, hymns and tunes, decision-making processes, synods and committees, superintendents and archdeacons—all were exported and unimaginatively introduced into the new mission-founded churches. It should be added that these patterns were also eagerly adopted by the new Christians, determined not to be at any point behind their Western friends, whose habits and ways of worship they had been attentively watching. But all this was based on the false assumptions that the Bible gave specific instructions about such matters and that the home churches' pattern of government, worship, ministry, and life were themselves exemplary.

In reaction to this monocultural export system, pioneer missionary thinkers like Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the middle of the last century and Roland Allen earlier in this century popularized the concept of "indigenous" churches, which would be "self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating." They argued their case well. They pointed out that the policy of the apostle Paul was to plant churches, not to found mission stations. They also added pragmatic arguments to biblical ones, namely that indigeneity was indispensable to the church's growth in maturity and mission. Henry Venn confidently looked forward to the day when missions would hand over all responsibility to national churches, and then what he called "the euthanasia of the mission" would take place. These views gained wide acceptance and were immensely influential.

In our day, however, they are being criticized, not because of the ideal itself, but because of the way it has often been applied. Some missions, for example, have accepted the need for indigenous leadership and have then gone on to recruit and train local leaders, indoctrinating them (the word is harsh but not unfair) in Western ways of thought and

procedure. These Westernized local leaders have then preserved a very Western-looking church, and the foreign orientation has persisted, only lightly cloaked by the appearance of indigeneity.

Now, therefore, a more radical concept of indigenous church life needs to be developed, by which each church may discover and express its selfhood as the body of Christ within its own culture.

### **B. The Dynamic Equivalence Model**

Using the distinctions between "form" and "meaning," and between "formal correspondence" and "dynamic equivalence," which have been developed in translation theory and on which we have commented in Section 3, it is being suggested that an analogy may be drawn between Bible translation and church formation. "Formal correspondence" speaks of a slavish imitation, whether in translating a word into another language or exporting a church model to another culture. Just as a "dynamic equivalence" translation, however, seeks to convey to contemporary readers meanings equivalent to those conveyed to the original readers, by using appropriate cultural forms, so would a "dynamic equivalence" church. It would look in its culture as a good Bible translation looks in its language. It would preserve the essential meanings and functions which the New Testament predicated of the church, but would seek to express these in forms equivalent to the originals but appropriate to the local culture. We have all found this model helpful and suggestive, and we strongly affirm the ideals it seeks to express. It rightly rejects foreign imports and imitations, and rigid structures. It rightly looks to the New Testament for the principles of church formation, rather than to either tradition or culture, and it equally rightly looks to the local culture for the appropriate forms in which these principles should be expressed. All of us (even those who see limitations in the model) share the vision which it is trying to describe.

Thus, the New Testament indicates that the church is always a worshipping community, "a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 2:5), but forms of worship (including the presence or absence of different kinds of liturgy, ceremony, music, color, drama, etc.) will be developed by the church in keeping with indigenous culture. Similarly, the church is always a witnessing and a serving community, but its methods of evangelism and its program of social involvement will vary. Again, God desires all churches to have pastoral oversight (*episkope*), but forms of government and ministry may differ widely, and the selection, training, ordination, service, dress, payment, and accountability of pastors will be determined by the church to accord with biblical principles and to suit the local culture.

The questions which are being asked about the "dynamic equivalence" model are whether by itself it is large enough and dynamic enough to provide all the guidance which is needed. The analogy between Bible translation and church formation is not exact. In the former the translator controls the work, and when the task is complete it is possible to make a comparison of the two texts. In the latter, however, the original to which an equivalent is being sought is not a

detailed text but a series of glimpses of the early church in operation, making the comparison more difficult, and instead of a controlling translator the whole community of faith must be involved. Further, a translator aims at personal objectivity, but when the local church is seeking to relate itself appropriately to the local culture, it finds objectivity almost impossible. In many situations it is caught in "an encounter between two civilizations" (that of its own society and that of the missionaries). Furthermore, it may have great difficulty in responding to the conflicting voices of the local community. Some clamor for change (in terms of literacy, education, technology, modern medicine, industrialization, etc.), while others insist on the conservation of the old culture and resist the arrival of a new day. It is asked whether the "dynamic equivalence" model is dynamic enough to face this kind of challenge.

The test of this or any other model for helping churches develop appropriately, is whether it can enable God's people to capture in their hearts and minds the grand design of which their church is to be the local expression. Every model presents only a partial picture. Local churches need to rely ultimately on the dynamic pressure of the Living Lord of history. For it is he who will guide his people in every age to develop their church life in such a way as both to obey the instructions he has given in Scripture and to reflect the good elements of their local culture.

### **C. The Freedom of the Church**

If each church is to develop creatively in such a way as to find and express itself, it must be free to do so. This is its inalienable right. For each church is God's church. United to Christ, it is a dwelling place of God through his Spirit (Eph. 2:22). Some missions and missionaries have been slow to recognize this, and to accept its implications in the direction of indigenous forms and an every-member ministry. This is one of the many causes which have led to the formation of Independent Churches, notably in Africa, which are seeking new ways of self-expression in terms of local culture.

Although local church leaders have also sometimes impeded indigenous development, the chief blame lies elsewhere. It would not be fair to generalize. The situation has always been diverse. In earlier generations there were missions which never manifested a spirit of domination. In this century some churches have sprung up which have never been under missionary control, having enjoyed self-government from the start. In other cases missions have entirely surrendered their former power, so that some mission-founded churches are now fully autonomous, and many missions now work in genuine partnership with churches.

Yet this is not the whole picture. Other churches are still almost completely inhibited from developing their own identity and program by policies laid down from afar, by the introduction and continuation of foreign traditions, by the use of expatriate leadership, by alien decision-making processes, and especially by the manipulative use of money. Those who maintain such control may be genuinely unaware of the way in which their actions are regarded and experienced at the other end. They may be felt by the churches concerned to be a tyranny. The fact that this is neither

intended nor realized illustrates perfectly how all of us (whether we know it or not) are involved in the culture which has made us what we are. We strongly oppose such "foreignness," wherever it exists, as a serious obstacle to maturity and mission, and a quenching of the Holy Spirit of God.

It was in protest against the continuance of foreign control that a few years ago the call was made to withdraw all missionaries. In this debate some of us want to avoid the word "moratorium" because it has become an emotive term and sometimes betrays a resentment against the very concept of "missionaries." Others of us wish to retain the word in order to emphasize the truth it expresses. To us it means not a rejection of missionary personnel and money in themselves, but only of their misuse in such a way as to suffocate local initiative. We all agree with the statement of the Lausanne Covenant that "a reduction of foreign missionaries and money ... may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church's growth in self-reliance..." (paragraph 9).

#### **D. Power Structures and Mission**

What we have just written is part of a much wider problem, which we have not felt able to ignore. The contemporary world does not consist of isolated atomic societies, but is an interrelated global system of economic, political, technological, and ideological macro-structures, which undoubtedly results in much exploitation and oppression.

What has this got to do with mission? And why do we raise it here? Partly because it is the context within which the gospel must be preached to all nations today. Partly also because nearly all of us either belong to the Third World, or live and work there, or have done so, or have visited some countries in it. So we have seen with our own eyes the poverty of the masses, we feel for them and with them, and we have some understanding that their plight is due in part to an economic system which is controlled mostly by the North Atlantic countries (although others are now also involved). Those of us who are citizens of North American or European countries cannot avoid some feeling of embarrassment and shame, by reason of the oppression in which our countries in various degrees have been involved.

Of course, we know that there is oppression in many countries today, and we oppose it everywhere. But now we are talking about ourselves, our own countries, and our responsibility as Christians. Most of the world's missionaries and missionary money come from these countries, often at great personal sacrifice. Yet we have to confess that some missionaries themselves reflect a neo-colonial attitude and even defend it, together with outposts of Western power and exploitation such as Southern Africa.

So what should we do? The only honest response is to say that we do not know. Armchair criticism smacks of hypocrisy. We have no ready-made solutions to offer to this worldwide problem. Indeed, we feel victims of the system ourselves. And yet we are also part of it. So we feel able to make only these comments.

First, Jesus himself constantly identified with the poor and weak. We accept the obligation to follow in his footsteps in this matter as in all others. At least by the love which prays and gives we mean to strengthen our solidarity with them.

Jesus did more than identify, however. In his teaching and that of the apostles the corollary of good news to the oppressed was a word of judgment to the oppressor (e.g., Luke 6:24-26; Jas. 5:1-6). We confess that in complex economic situations it is not easy to identify oppressors in order to denounce them without resorting to a shrill rhetoric which neither costs nor accomplishes anything. Nevertheless, we accept that there will be occasions when it is our Christian duty to speak out against injustice in the name of the Lord who is the God of justice as well as of justification. We shall seek from him the courage and wisdom to do so.

Thirdly, this Consultation has expressed its concern about syncretism in Third World churches. But we have not forgotten that Western churches fall prey to the same sin. Indeed, perhaps the most insidious form of syncretism in the world today is the attempt to mix a privatized gospel of personal forgiveness with a worldly (even demonic) attitude to wealth and power. We are not guiltless in this matter ourselves. Yet we desire to be integrated Christians for whom Jesus is truly Lord of all. So we who belong to, or come from, the West will examine ourselves and seek to purge ourselves of Western-style syncretism. We agree that "the salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead" (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 5).

### **E. The Danger of Provincialism**

We have emphasized that the church must be allowed to indigenize itself, and to "celebrate, sing and dance" the gospel in its own cultural medium. At the same time, we wish to be alert to the dangers of this process. Some churches in all six continents go beyond a joyful and thankful discovery of their local cultural heritage, and either become boastful and assertive about it (a form of chauvinism) or even absolutize it (a form of idolatry). More common than either of these extremes, however, is "provincialism," that is, such a retreat into their own culture as cuts them adrift from the rest of the church and from the wider world. This is a frequent stance in Western churches as well as in the Third World. It denies the God of creation and redemption. It is to proclaim one's freedom, only to enter another bondage. We draw attention to the three major reasons why we think this attitude should be avoided.

First, each church is part of the universal church. The people of God are by his grace a unique multi-racial, multi-national, multi-cultural community. This community is God's new creation, his new humanity, in which Christ has abolished all barriers (see Ephesians 2 and 3). There is therefore no room for racism in the Christian society, or for tribalism—whether in its African form, or in the form of European social classes, or of the Indian caste system. Despite the church's failures, this vision of a supra-ethnic community of love is not a romantic ideal, but a command of the Lord. Therefore, while rejoicing in our cultural inheritance and developing our own indigenous forms, we must always



remember that our primary identity as Christians is not in our particular culture but in the one Lord and his one body (Eph. 4:3-6).

Secondly, each church worships the living God of cultural diversity. If we thank him for our cultural heritage, we should thank him for others' also. Our church should never become so culture-bound that visitors from another culture do not feel welcome. Indeed, we believe it is enriching for Christians, if they have the opportunity, to develop a bi-cultural and even a multi-cultural existence, like the apostle Paul who was both a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a master of the Greek language, and a Roman citizen.

Thirdly, each church should enter into a "partnership ... in giving and receiving" (Phil. 4:15). No church is, or should try to become, self-sufficient. So churches should develop with each other relationships of prayer, fellowship, interchange of ministry and cooperation. Provided that we share the same central truths (including the supreme lordship of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, the necessity of conversion, confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the obligations of holiness and witness), we should be outgoing and not timid in seeking fellowship; and we should share our spiritual gifts and ministries, knowledge, skills, experience, and financial resources. The same principle applies to cultures. A church must be free to reject alien cultural forms and develop its own; it should also feel free to borrow from others. This way lies maturity.

One example of this concerns theology. Cross-cultural witnesses must not attempt to impose a ready-made theological tradition on the church in which they serve, either by personal teaching or by literature or by controlling seminary and Bible college curricula. For every theological tradition both contains elements which are biblically questionable and have been ecclesiastically divisive and omits elements which, while they might be of no great consequence in the country where it originated, may be of immense importance in other contexts. At the same time, although missionaries ought not to impose their own tradition on others, they also ought not to deny them access to it (in the form of books, confessions, catechism, liturgies and hymns), since it doubtless represents a rich heritage of faith. Moreover, although the theological controversies of the older churches should not be exported to the younger churches, yet an understanding of the issues, and of the work of the Holy Spirit in the unfolding history of Christian doctrine, should help to protect them from unprofitable repetition of the same battles.

Thus we should seek with equal care to avoid theological imperialism or theological provincialism. A church's theology should be developed by the community of faith out of the Scripture in interaction with other theologies of the past and present, and with the local culture and its needs.

### **F. The Danger of Syncretism**

As the church seeks to express its life in local cultural forms, it soon has to face the problem of cultural elements which either are evil or have evil associations. How should the church react to these? Elements which are intrinsically

false or evil clearly cannot be assimilated into Christianity without a lapse into syncretism. This is a danger for all churches in all cultures. If the evil is in the association only, however, we believe it is right to seek to "baptize" it into Christ. It is the principle on which William Booth operated when he set Christian words to popular music, asking why the devil should have all the best tunes. Thus many African churches now use drums to summon people to worship, although previously they were unacceptable, as being associated with war dances and mediumistic rites.

Yet this principle raises problems. In a proper reaction against foreigners, an improper flirtation with the demonic element of local culture sometimes takes place. So the church, being first and foremost a servant of Jesus Christ, must learn to scrutinize all culture, both foreign and local, in the light of his lordship and God's revelation. By what guidelines, therefore, does a church accept or reject culture traits in the process of contextualization? How does it prevent or detect and eliminate heresy (wrong teaching) and syncretism (harmful carry-overs from the old way of life)? How does it protect itself from becoming a "folk church" in which church and society are virtually synonymous?

One particular model we have studied is that of the church in Bali, Indonesia, which is now about 40 years old. Its experience has provided the following guidelines:

The believing community first searched the Scriptures and learned from them many important biblical truths. They then observed that other churches (e.g., round the Mediterranean) used architecture to symbolize Christian truth. This was important because the Balinese are very "visual" people and value visible signs. So it was decided, for example, to express their affirmation of faith in the Trinity in a Balinese-style three-tiered roof for their church buildings. The symbol was first considered by the council of elders who, after studying both biblical and cultural factors, recommended it to local congregations.

The detection and elimination of heresy followed a similar pattern. When believers suspected an error in life or teaching, they would report it to an elder, who would take it to the council of elders. Having considered the matter, they in their turn passed their recommendations to the local churches who had the final word.

What was the most important safeguard of the church? To this question the answer was: "We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and Master of all powers." By preaching his power, "the same yesterday and today and forever," by insisting at all times on the normative nature of the Scriptures, by entrusting elders with the obligation to reflect on Scripture and culture, by breaking down all barriers to fellowship, and by building into structures, catechism, art forms, drama, etc., constant reminders of the exalted position of Jesus Christ, his church has been preserved in truth and holiness.

Sometimes, in different parts of the world, a cultural element may be adopted which deeply disturbs oversensitive consciences, especially those of new converts. This is the problem of the "weaker brother" of whom Paul writes in connection with idol-meats. Since idols were nothing, Paul himself had liberty of conscience to eat these meats. But for the sake of "weaker" Christians with a less well-educated conscience, who would be offended to see him

eat, he refrained, at least in specific situations in which such offence might be caused. The principle still applies today. Scripture takes conscience seriously and tells us not to violate it. It needs to be educated in order to become "strong," but while it remains "weak" it must be respected. A strong conscience will give us freedom; but love limits liberty.

### **G. The Church's Influence on Culture**

We deplore the pessimism which leads some Christians to disapprove of active cultural engagement in the world, and the defeatism which persuades others that they could do no good there anyway and should therefore wait in inactivity for Christ to put things right when he comes. Many historical examples could be given, drawn from different ages and countries, of the powerful influence which—under God—the church has exerted on a prevailing culture, purging, claiming, and beautifying it for Christ. Though all such attempts have had defects, they do not prove the enterprise mistaken.

We prefer, however, to base the church's cultural responsibility on Scripture rather than on history. We have reminded ourselves that our fellow men and women are made in God's image, and that we are commanded to honor, love, and serve them in every sphere of life. To this argument from God's creation we add another from his kingdom which broke into the world through Jesus Christ. All authority belongs to Christ. He is lord of both universe and church. And he has sent us into the world to be its salt and light. As his new community, he expects us to permeate society.

Thus we are to challenge what is evil and affirm what is good; to welcome and seek to promote all that is wholesome and enriching in art, science, technology, agriculture, industry, education, community development and social welfare; to denounce injustice and support the powerless and the oppressed; to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, which is the most liberating and humanizing force in the world; and actively to engage in good works of love. Although, in social and cultural activity as in evangelism, we must leave the results to God, we are confident that he will bless our endeavors and use them to develop in our community a new consciousness of what is "true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable" (Phil. 4:8, TEV). Of course, the church cannot impose Christian standards on an unwilling society, but it can commend them by both argument and example. All this will bring glory to God and greater opportunities of humanness to our fellow human beings whom he made and loves. As the Lausanne Covenant put it, "churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God" (paragraph 10).

Nevertheless, naive optimism is as foolish as dark pessimism. In place of both, we seek a sober Christian realism. On the one hand, Jesus Christ reigns. On the other, he has not yet destroyed the forces of evil; they still rampage. So in every culture Christians find themselves in a situation of conflict and often of suffering. We are called to fight against the "cosmic powers of this dark age" (Eph. 6:12, TEV). So we need each other. We must put on all God's amour, and especially the mighty weapon of believing prayer. We also remember the warnings of Christ and his apostles that before the end there will be an unprecedented outbreak of wickedness and violence. Some events and

developments in our contemporary world indicate that the spirit of the coming Antichrist is already at work not only in the non-Christian world, but both in our own partially Christianized societies and even in the churches themselves. "We therefore reject as a proud, self-confident dream the notion that man can ever build a utopia on earth" (Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 15), and as a groundless fantasy that society is going to evolve into perfection.

Instead, while energetically laboring on earth, we look forward with joyful anticipation to the return of Christ, and to the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness will dwell. For then not only will culture be transformed, as the nations bring their glory into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24-26) but the whole creation will be liberated from its present bondage of futility, decay and pain, so as to share the glorious freedom of God's children (Rom. 8:18-25, TEV). Then at last every knee will bow to Christ and every tongue openly proclaim that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. Is your local church "free" to develop its own selfhood? If not, what forces are hindering it? See Section 8 a-d.
2. Section 8d has some hard things to say about " power-structures." Do you agree? If so, can you do anything about it?
3. "Provincialism" (8e) and "syncretism" (8f) are both mistakes of a church which is trying to express its identity in local, cultural forms. Is your church making either mistake? How can they be avoided without repudiating indigenous culture?
4. Should the church in your country be doing more to "transform and enrich" its national culture? If so, in what way?

### **9. Culture, Christian Ethics and Life Style**

Having considered in Section 7 some of the cultural factors in Christian conversion, we come finally to the relations between culture and Christian ethical behavior. For the new life Christ gives his people is bound to issue in a new life style.

#### **A. Christ-centeredness and Christ-likeness**

One of the themes running right through our Consultation has been the supreme Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is Lord of the universe and the church; he is Lord of the individual believer also. We find ourselves gripped by the love of Christ. It hems us in and leaves us no escape. Because we enjoy newness of life through his death for us, we have no alternative (and desire none) but to live for him who died for us and rose again (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). Our first loyalty is to

him, to seek to please him, to live a life worthy of him, and to obey him. This necessitates the renunciation of all lesser loyalties. So we are forbidden to conform ourselves to this world's standards, that is, to any prevailing culture which fails to honor God, and are commanded instead to be transformed in our conduct by renewed minds which perceive the will of God.

God's will was perfectly obeyed by Jesus. Therefore, "the most outstanding thing about a Christian should not be his culture, but his Christlikeness." As the mid-second century *Letter to Diognetus* put it: "Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by country or by speech or by customs ... they follow the customs of the land in clothing and food and other matters of daily life, yet the condition of citizenship which they exhibit is wonderful ... In a word, what the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world."

### **B. Moral Standards and Cultural Practices**

Culture is never static. It varies both from place to place and from time to time. And throughout the long history of the church in different countries, Christianity has, in some measure, destroyed culture, preserved it, and in the end created a new culture in place of the old. So everywhere Christians need to think seriously about just how their new life in Christ should relate to contemporary culture.

In our Consultation's preliminary papers two rather similar models were set before us. One suggested that there are several categories of customs which need to be distinguished. The first includes those practices which the convert will be expected to renounce immediately as being wholly incompatible with the Christian gospel (e.g., idolatry, the possession of slaves, witchcraft and sorcery, head hunting, blood feuds, ritual prostitution, and all personal discriminations based on race, color class or caste). A second category might comprise institutionalized customs which could be tolerated for a while but would be expected to disappear gradually (e.g., systems of caste, slavery, and polygamy). A third category might relate to marriage traditions, especially questions of consanguinity, on which the churches are divided, while into a fourth category would be put the so-called *adiaphora* or "matters indifferent," which relate only to customs and not to morals, and therefore may be preserved without any compromise (e.g., eating and bathing customs, forms of public greeting to the opposite sex, hair and dress styles, etc.).

The second model we have considered distinguishes between "direct" and "indirect" encounters between Christ and culture, which correspond approximately to the first and second categories of the other model. Applied to 19th century Fiji in the case-study presented to us, it was assumed that there would be "direct encounter" with such inhuman practices as cannibalism, widow-strangling, infanticide, and patricide, and that converts would be expected to abandon these customs upon conversion. "Indirect" encounter would take place, however, either when the moral issue was not so clear-cut (e.g., some marriage customs, initiation rites, festivals and musical celebrations involving song, dance and instruments) or when it becomes apparent only after the convert has begun to work out his or her new faith in the

applied Christian life. Some of these practices will not need to be discarded, but rather to be purged of unclean elements and invested with Christian meaning. Old customs can be given new symbolism, old dances can celebrate new blessings, and old crafts can serve new purposes. To borrow an expression from the Old Testament, swords can be hammered into ploughs and spears into pruning-knives.

The Lausanne Covenant said: "The Gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture" (paragraph 10). We wish to endorse this, and to emphasize that even in this present age of relativity moral absolutes remain. Indeed, churches which study the Scriptures should not find it difficult to discern what belongs to the first or "direct encounter" category. Scriptural principles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will also guide them regarding the category of "indirect encounter." An additional test proposed is to ask whether a practice enhances or diminishes human life.

It will be seen that our studies have focused mainly on situations where younger churches have to take up a moral stance against certain evils. But we have been reminded that the church needs to confront evil in Western culture too. In the 20th century West, often more sophisticated but no less horrible examples of the evils which were opposed in 19th century Fiji exist. Parallel to cannibalism is social injustice which "eats" the poor; to widow-strangling, the oppression of women; to infanticide, abortion; to patricide, a criminal neglect of senior citizens; to tribal wars, World Wars I and II; and to ritual prostitution, sexual promiscuity. In considering this parallelism, it is necessary to remember both the added guilt adhering to the nominally Christian nations, and also the courageous Christian protest against such evils, and the immense (though incomplete) successes which have been won in mitigating these evils. Evil takes many forms, but it is universal, and wherever it appears Christians must confront and repudiate it.

### **C. The Process of Cultural Change**

It is not enough for converts to make a personal renunciation of the evils in their culture; the whole church needs to work for their elimination. Hence, the importance of asking how cultures change under the influence of the gospel. Of course, the evil and the demonic are deeply entrenched in most cultures, and yet Scripture calls for national repentance and reform, and history records numerous cases of cultural change for the better. In fact, in some cases culture is not as resistant to necessary change as it may appear. Great care is needed, however, when seeking to initiate it.

First, "people change as and when they want to." This seems to be axiomatic. Further, they want to change only when they perceive the positive benefits which change will bring them. These will need to be carefully argued and patiently demonstrated, whether Christians are advocating in a developing country the benefits of literacy or the value of clean water, or in a Western country the importance of stable marriage and family life.

Secondly, cross-cultural witnesses in the Third World need to have great respect for the in-built mechanisms of social change in general, and for the "correct procedures of innovation" in each particular culture.

Thirdly, it is important to remember that virtually all customs perform important functions within the culture, and that even socially undesirable practices may perform "constructive" functions. That being so, a custom should never be abolished without first discerning its function and then substituting another custom which performs the same function.

For example, it may be right to wish to see abolished some of the initiatory rites associated with the circumcision of adolescents and some of the forms of sex education which accompany it. This is not to deny that there is much of value in the processes of initiation; great care must be taken to see that adequate substitutes are provided for the rites and forms of initiation which the Christian conscience would desire to see abolished.

Fourthly, it is essential to recognize that some cultural practices have a theological undergirding. When this is so, the culture will change only when the theology changes. Thus, if widows are killed in order that their husbands may not enter the next world unattended, or if older people are killed before senility overtakes them, in order that in the next world they may be strong enough to fight and hunt, then such killings, because founded on a false eschatology, will be abandoned only when a better alternative, the Christian hope, is accepted in its place.

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. Can "Christ-likeness" be recognized in every culture? What are its ingredients?
2. In your own culture, what would you expect a new convert to renounce immediately?
3. Take some "institutionalized custom" in your country which Christians hope will "disappear gradually" (e.g., polygamy, the caste system, easy divorce, or some form of oppression). What active steps should Christians be taking to work for change?

#### **Conclusion**

Our Consultation has left us in no doubt of the pervasive importance of culture. The writing and the reading of the Bible, the presentation of the gospel, conversion, church and conduct—all these are influenced by culture. It is essential, therefore, that all churches contextualize the gospel in order to share it effectively in their own culture. For this task of evangelization, we all know our urgent need of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of truth who can teach each church how to relate to the culture which envelops it. He is also the Spirit of love, and love is "the language—which is understood in every culture of man." So may God fill us with his Spirit! Then, speaking the truth in love, we shall grow up into Christ who is the head of the body, to the everlasting glory of God (Eph. 4:15).

NOTE: Unattributed quotations in this report have been drawn from various papers presented at this Consultation.

### **The Consultation Program and Papers**

January 7 **Culture and Revelation** (cultural factors in the Bible)

Old Testament: S. Ananda Kumar

New Testament: I. Howard Marshall

Towards a Theology of Culture: Bruce J. Nichols

January 8 **Culture and Hermeneutics** (understanding the Bible today)

A Theological Perspective: C. Rene Padilla

An Anthropological Perspective: Charles R. Taber

January 9 **Culture and Evangelization** (the content and communication of the gospel)

A Theological Perspective: James I. Packer

An Anthropological Perspective: Jacob A. Loewen

January 10 **Culture and Conversion** (the implications of culture in the conversion experience)

The East African Setting: Donald R. Jacobs

Theological Dimensions from a Korean Perspective: Harvie M. Conn

A Personal Case-study: Orlando E. Costas

January 11 **Culture and Churches** (Christian churches and their immersion in culture)

A Dynamic Equivalence Model: Charles H. Kraft

A Socio-Historical Critique: Alfred C. Krass

A Case-study from Indonesia: I. Wayan Mastra

January 12 **Culture and Ethics** (the contextualization of the gospel in Christian behavior)

The Christian Life-style: Gottfried Osei-Mensah

A Case-study from Oceania: Alan R. Tippett

### **Background Papers**

Religion and Culture, a Historical Survey: Stephen C. Neill

Conversion and Convertibility, with Special reference to Muslims: Kenneth Cragg

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# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## Unit 4

### *Aliens & Strangers*



## Development Associates International

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# Unit 4 – Aliens & Strangers

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Discuss from the Bible God’s desire for his people to reach out and care for those who are “outside” of your own culture or ethnic group.
- Design phrases or behaviors that help you start see people around you in ways that reflect their significance to God.
- Recall two questions we can ask ourselves which reveal cultural stereotypes that allow us to treat others like “outcasts” or “Samaritans”
- Identify steps you’ll need to take in an effort to cross barriers in an effort to treat people with compassion.

Remember the additional reading from the textbook for this unit:

**“Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility”, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 (pp.19-40)**

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### Introduction Author’s Note

In Unit 3, I told you about the conference in Singapore I attended where I first encountered the issues of cultural diversity in the Body of Christ – but I didn’t tell you the whole story. My first responses were not those of “celebrating diversity.” Instead, many of my first reactions were those of judging others by my cultural values and norms.

In my mind, I was asking questions which revealed that I thought my culture was somehow superior to others. My questions included “Why did the Singaporeans drive on the “wrong” side of the road?” or “Why is that fellow eating with his hands – that so unsanitary.” I found myself judging peoples’ attire (“Why is that man wearing something that looks like a dress?”) or criticizing their intelligence (“If he’s smart, why doesn’t he speak better English?”) or even questioning their spirituality (“Why does that lady pray so loudly? It sounds like she’ll yelling at God. Is God deaf?”)

Even though I knew that the Bible affirms God’s love and redemptive plan for all peoples, tribes, ethnicities, and nations, I was struggling with the fact that all of these people are different from me and my culture. Because of our many differences, I was failing to see these “Others” as my brothers and sisters in a very large, cross-cultural family. The fact that we were different combined with my being in a place where I was the foreigner left me feeling quite insecure. To compensate, I fell prey to the temptation we discussed in Unit 2 - to exalt myself over others in an effort to secure my own sense of identity.

Though I believed in theory that our God is Lord of all the nations of the earth, I found myself wanting to feel superior to people who were different. I think that this is a struggle we all face. I know it’s a struggle that Israel faced in the Old Testament. So let’s start there.

### Think about it

Answer Box # 0

Think of your own interactions with people of other cultures. Can you recall one or two experiences where you – like the author – saw other people’s cultural expressions as “wrong” or “strange” or even offensive?



learning

## The Old Testament Multi-Ethnic Background

Israel's sense of ethnic uniqueness deteriorated into ethnocentricity when they started believing that their people were better than all the others. The people of Israel – given their sense of divine election (see below and in Unit 5) – viewed their “pureblood” status as the people of God as a reason to disregard or look down upon others.

But the Israelites sense of cultural or ethnic uniqueness was built on a shaky foundation. The Bible does not begin by focusing on the nation of Israel but with the “Table of Nations” (Genesis 10 and 11). The main theological point of the Table of Nations was not to elevate Israel but rather to show that all the nations on earth had one common origin. J. Daniel Hays observes that Israel was far from a pure ethnicity. He points out that they were basically a mixed-race people who came out of a multi-ethnic world.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of multi-ethnicity underlies a very important but often overlooked aspect of the biblical teaching on race. When we consider the world out of which the covenant to Abram came, Hays asserts that “Coming to grips with the multi-ethnic, non-Caucasian cultural context of the Old Testament is a critical foundational step in developing a truly biblical theology of race.”<sup>2</sup>

In From Every People and Nation, he spends an entire introductory chapter on the ethnic make-up of the Old Testament world. He identifies the fact that Israel is missing as one of the ancient peoples of the world (Genesis 10), thus showing that the Israelites actually came from other peoples intermarrying.<sup>3</sup> Abraham is identified as an Amorite, and “the biblical tradition presents the ancestors of the tribes of Israel as a mix of western Mesopotamian (Aramean and/or Amorite), Canaanite, and Egyptian.”<sup>4</sup> He concludes: “In its formative stage, Israel was far from being ethnically monolithic. The family of Jacob had Aramean, Amorite, Canaanite, and Egyptian elements within it.”<sup>5</sup>

## Israel and Outsiders

Whatever Israel's ethnic heritage, however, they certainly saw themselves as separated peoples by the time the first five books of the Bible were being written. A reading of these books and the various laws for Israel seem to lay a foundation for ethnic and cultural separation, not unified diversity. Why do these laws exist – especially if God's design is to unite us in spite of our diverse cultures and backgrounds?

As Israel lived 400 years in Egypt, they probably developed their own specific sense of ethnic identity because here they were living alongside “others” who forced them to define themselves as different. After the Exodus, Moses began establishing the Law. Hays points out that all of the ethnic separation laws of the Old Testament as well as the laws against inter-marriage were

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<sup>1</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 85.

always based on theological issues, not racial or ethnic ones: “the inhabitants [of the Promised Land] worship other gods and intermarrying with them would inevitably lead to the apostasy of God’s people.”<sup>6</sup>

Pointing out that “inter-marriage is the litmus test of racial prejudice”<sup>7</sup>, Hays notes that note Moses’ first marriage was to Zipporah, a Baal worshipping Midianite; then he marries a Cushite (or Ethiopian) woman. He documents that the Egypt of Moses’ upbringing would have included many black Africans, and it’s here that he most likely met this woman.<sup>8</sup> Miriam objects and God’s condemnation is ironically “white” – making her skin white with leprosy.

### Think about it



### learning

#### Answer Box # 1

#### Reflection

*What are your thoughts, convictions, feelings about inter-racial marriage? Support your argument from the Bible.*

Israel was commanded by God to be separated for the purposes of holiness and faithfulness to Yahweh, but his redemptive purposes were not exclusive to the people of Israel. Non-Jews in the revealed plan of salvation in the Old Testament include:

- Those Egyptians who left Egypt and escaped the angel of death with them (see Exodus 12:31-39)
- Moses’ wives and potentially his father-in-law, Jethro (although his religious status is not clarified in the texts) (Numbers 12:1; Exodus 3:1ff)
- Rahab the harlot (Joshua 2:1ff; 6:17ff; Matthew 1:5)
- Naaman the Syrian (II Kings 5:1-23)
- Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth; Matthew 1:5)
- And some even include Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:34ff)

<sup>6</sup> See J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 77 as well as Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Exodus 34:15-16; Joshua 23:12.

<sup>7</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p.81.

<sup>8</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, Chapter 4.

Add to this the various laws about care for outsiders, aliens, and strangers, and one must conclude that the commands toward Israel to remain separated from outsiders was not to establish Israel as the only ethnicity that could be the people of God. Instead, the mandates for separation were to keep them faithful so that they could fulfill their God-given role of blessing the nations.

## Redemption of the Nations: Other Old Testament Passages



**bible study**

Answer Box # 2

### **Biblical Reflection:**

*Read the following passages which address the Old Testament Laws concerning the treatment of outsiders: Numbers 15:15; Deuteronomy 5:14; 10:17-19; 24:14-21; 26:12-13). What do these verses tell you about “outsiders”? What do they tell you about the character of God?*

When we think about people from other cultures or ethnic groups, our starting point is often our own culture against which we compare them. Instead, let's start with God's perspective. We discover in the Bible that God's heart for all the cultures and ethnicities on earth is displayed all through the Old Testament:

- God claims all the nations (Psalm 2:8; 24:1; 33:8; 46:10)
- He states his concern for the aliens and strangers (Jeremiah 22:3; Ezekiel 47:21-23)
- He extends his grace to Gentiles (Isaiah 9: 1-2)
- He describes a vision of an eternal kingdom where all nations and tongues come together (Isaiah 66:18-19)

To understand God's concern for those outside of the people of Israel more fully, consider these other biblical stories which underline the fact that the God of the Bible is the God of all nations:

**The Book of Ruth**, read in its cultural context, was a rebuke to the Jewish ethno-nationalism of that day. Written during the time of Nehemiah, Ruth was a Gentile woman living during a time of religious and national intolerance. Her story is included in the Bible because it carried a protest message:

God's grace transcends and defies racial, religious, and national exclusiveness. It serves to remind the people of Israel that if Ruth had been rejected because she was a Moabite, then there would have been no David or Solomon, for their

lineage was traced directly to Ruth. In the book of Ruth, the foreigner, the stranger, is embraced and honored as an instrument of God's mercy.<sup>9</sup>

**Psalms 67** reflects that the promise to Abraham – to be a blessing on all peoples to the ends of the earth (Genesis 12) – is now a corporate blessing on the larger people of God. There is no room for ethnic exclusivity when it comes to God's blessing. God designs that his chosen people will bless all the nations on earth.

**Isaiah** stands out as a prophetic rebuke to the isolationist and exclusivist tendencies of Israel. Daniel Hays introduces his study of Isaiah by asserting that "... the book of Isaiah advances the concept of equal salvation for all peoples and nations more than any other prophetic book."<sup>10</sup>

**Isaiah 2:2-4**: the peace described in Isaiah 2:2-4 is multi-national and inter-racial. The mix of peoples worshipping together will be described: a Jewish remnant, the hated Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the Black Cushites.

**Isaiah 11:6-9** gives us imagery that illustrate priority in the Kingdom of God of bringing the powerless and the powerful together: "If cultures are analogous to the different animals, then Isaiah 11:6-9 becomes a vision of culturally diverse peoples living together in harmony and peace."<sup>11</sup>

**Isaiah 49:6** is God's challenge to point the people of Israel outward, beyond their cultural limitations and their ethnic exclusivity. To be concerned solely for the redemption of the people of Israel was "too small a thing" for the God of all nations. Rhodes reminds us that: "Israel was special [and so the Church] because it was given a universal concern as a nation. Unlike other nations that could and would live for self-interest and self-preservation, Israel would always be nation set apart for the blessing of all."<sup>12</sup>

### Think about it

#### Answer Box # 3

#### **Biblical Reflection:**

Think about people in your own community who are ethnically or culturally different from you. Think of three or four ways that God might call you to "bless all of the peoples around you" – no matter their ethnic diversity.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen A. Rhodes. Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 124.

<sup>10</sup> J. Daniel Hays, From Every People and Nation, p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> Eric H.F. Law. The Wolf Shall Lie Down With the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), p. 3).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen A. Rhodes. Where the Nations Meet, p. 39.



## The Global Plan of God in the New Testament

In the New Testament, God constantly brings the people of God back to the fact that his love is for all peoples and his plan is for the redemption of peoples, tribes, linguistic groups, and ethnically diverse people.<sup>13</sup> But this redemption – especially as it is described in the description of the Church in the book of Ephesians – does **not** mean individual ethnic groupings worshipping in groups of people who are all the same.<sup>14</sup> Instead, God, through the redemptive work of Christ (see Units 10 and 11), breaks down ethnocentric divisions and brings us – with all of our diversity – into a new family.

In spite of the wideness and multi-cultural plan of God, the Jewish issue of being the unique people of God carries over into the New Testament – both in the ministry of Jesus and in the early church. But the overwhelming, international plan of God prevails, diversifying the church and announcing Good News for all.

**Matthew.** Even Matthew, the Gospel writer to the Jews, includes the “nations” throughout his Gospel. Matthew’s genealogy includes four Gentile women: Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites; Ruth is a Moabitess; and Bathsheba (married to Uriah, who Matthew mentions by name) was most likely a Hittite. Hays suggests “that Matthew uses the interracial marriage phenomenon in Jesus’ lineage to introduce the ‘inclusion of the Gentiles’ theme.”<sup>15</sup>

Matthew’s birth account of Jesus uniquely includes the *Magi* from the East, foreshadowing a theme that will appear later in that Gospel: *panta ta ethne*. The phrase literally means “all the ethnicities” or “all the nationalities” and Matthew will use it in summarizing themes related to persecution (Matthew 24:9), preaching (Matthew 24:14), and making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Before Matthew’s Gospel, the word “ethne” meant someone who was different and should be avoided. Matthew starts with the birth of Jesus and carries through to his ascension an inclusive vision of the word. He moves from a term of racial hostility to a word describing the “all peoples” in the plan of God. One scholar writes:

In time preceding Jesus, the word *ethnos* had a somewhat derogatory ring about it; it referred to those who were *not* the people of God. But here in Matthew our Lord’s words are inclusive. The blessing promised to and through Abraham is to come true in undreamed of ways. All are to be invited to become disciples of the risen Lord.”<sup>16</sup>

**Luke-Acts.** The “blessing to all nations” promise to Abraham<sup>17</sup> factors significantly into Luke’s writings. Abraham’s name occurs twenty-two times in Luke-Acts. Luke’s emphasis on the inclusion of the “outsider” results in his being the most cross-culturally vision expanding of the Gospels. Then he follows with the book of Acts, describing the multi-cultural plan of God being played out in the early church.

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<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed, technical explanation of all the ways the biblical writers refer to “outsiders” in the Old and New Testaments, see the notes at the very end of this Unit.

<sup>14</sup> Later in the course, we’ll refer to these “all the same” groups as “homogeneous units.”

<sup>15</sup> J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, p. 159.

<sup>16</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> See Luke 1:54-55, 1:72-73, and 2:30-32 – as well as 24:47

Luke and Acts include multiple stories of “outsiders” – from the Gospel’s inclusion of women, Gentiles, and Samaritans to the stories in Acts that include the Ethiopian eunuch and the Antioch leader from Niger. In contrast to Luke, other gospels refer to Samaritans only twice (Matthew 10:5 and John 4); Luke includes six Samaritan stories.

Luke is unique among the Gospel writers because of his focus on the issue of ethnicity for the new people of God. Luke connects the theology of salvation for all peoples back to Genesis 10-12, showing that the expansion of Christianity to all peoples is a continuity of God’s concern for all peoples and a fulfillment of these early chapters of Genesis.

Answer Box # 4

**Reflection question:**

*The Samaritans in biblical times were half-breeds, a culture separated from and despised by the Jews. This fact left many Jews highly critical of Jesus when he spoke with the Samaritans or used them as heroes in his parables. Which ethnic group in your community is most looked down upon? Why? Have you ever spoken favorably of these people to others or done something kind for them or had someone from this group in your home for a meal? Was there a reaction from others?*



**learning**

Luke writes so that readers can understand that “the inclusion of ethnically diverse people into the people of God was always God’s intention. Luke is also careful to note the important role that the Spirit plays in overcoming racial and cultural barriers and boundaries.”<sup>18</sup>

Later, in his depiction of the Spirit-transformed early church, “Luke stresses not only that the gospel demands to be proclaimed to all people of all ethnicities, but that the gospel also demands that all old culturally driven worldviews regarding racial prejudice be completely abandoned by the new people of God. Furthermore, the issue is not just *thinking* racial equality, but *doing* racial equality.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> J. Daniel Hays, From Every People and Nation, p.179.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Luke's Gospel concludes with the mandate to preach repentance to all nations – that same *panta ta ethne* theme that we saw in Matthew (Luke 24:47). Then he commences the record in Acts by repeating the “all nations” commission (Acts 1:8). This time, however, he identifies the recipients more specifically – Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. He is describing both the geographical and ethnical universalism for the destination of the gospel: all peoples everywhere need to hear this message and get invited to respond to God's love and be welcomed into the Christian community.

In a strong rebuke to the narrow nationalism of the disciples' question in Acts 1:6 – where their concern was the nation of Israel – Jesus sends them out across ethnic lines. When he specifically mentions Samaria, the disciples knew immediately that Jesus was not just referring to the Jews that were scattered geographically.<sup>20</sup> Jesus wanted them to be empowered by the Holy Spirit so that they could be his witnesses to everyone everywhere, even to the ends of the earth.

### Aliens and Strangers

The biblical teaching throughout demonstrates God's love for those who are separated, rejected, or ostracized for any number of reasons. Three themes emerge in the Scriptures which remind us that we should treat outsiders or those who are “strange” to us with dignity.

First, we are foreigners ourselves. In the Old Testament, God reminds the people of Israel that they should treat aliens well because they had been foreigners in Egypt. Paul picks up this theme in Ephesians and reminds all who are of non-Jewish roots that we who were foreign or outside-the-gate of the people of God have now been included because of Jesus (see Ephesians 2: 11-22).

Second, we need always to remember that our true home is in heaven. As a result, we should not get too comfortable in our cultural familiarity because we are pilgrims on a journey towards an eternal destination. In this world, we are “aliens and strangers” (Hebrews 11:13) who are anticipating a home far greater than this one (Hebrews 11:14-16).

Finally, we never know who the outsider actually is. Hebrews 13:2 tells us that strangers could possibly be an angel. Matthew 25 takes it a step further by explaining that the stranger we welcome in could actually be Jesus (Matthew 25: 35, 38, 43).

### A practical exercise:

#### Answer Box # 5

How can tell if we are treating those outside “our” group fairly? Two simple questions can help reveal our cultural stereotypes that allow us to treat others like “outcasts” or “Samaritans:”

- 1) When you see someone who is a stranger to you or your people, ask yourself, “Do I understand that this person is a precious soul created in the image of God, worthy of dignity and needing to experience the love of God through me?”
- 2) Ask yourself throughout the day, “What language or actions do I use to put others down in an effort to separate myself from them or feel superior to them?”

<sup>20</sup> These geographically dispersed Jews are often called the *Diaspora*.

## Final Assignment

### Final Assignment

Find someone in your community who you or your church might view as an “alien” or a “stranger” for any number of reasons (faith, culture, ethnicity, economic standing, etc). Invite them to join you in an experiment. Ask them to come by themselves or with their family to your church as a visitor. Inform them that you have only one request: to report back to you their experiences of how they were treated as visitors. After you hear their experiences, you can make a list that identifies the issues your church is facing as it tries to welcome “aliens and strangers” in their midst. (You might also want to thank this person with a small gift of some sort.)



## application

## Readings

### Extra Note: Biblical Language to Help Understand “Outsiders”



## reading

In the Greek versions of the Old and New Testaments, five words are used to describe foreigners:

- **Xenoi** refers to strangers; it was a harsh word describing someone who did not fit in and who most likely would be treated by the host culture with contempt, suspicion, and even hatred. The Bible uses this word to describe the challenge that faced the heroes of faith.<sup>21</sup>
- **Paroikos** is usually translated “sojourner” and it refers to those who were living in the land of another, either by choice or by force. The term was used to describe the Jews when they were in Egypt or Babylon as captives, but it could also refer to anyone who was simply “outside” the main culture.<sup>22</sup>
- **Parepidemos** refers to the foreigner (sometimes translated “pilgrim”), a person who was in the land of another but who had home somewhere else. Sometimes a foreigner was seen as someone who had been humiliated into leaving his homeland or who was living under some curse from God that had resulted in exile.<sup>23</sup>
- **Allotrios**, often translated “alien” or “stranger”<sup>24</sup> could mean foreign, strange, not of one’s own family, or even an outsider who was perceived an enemy.
- **Allogenes** occurs only once to describe a Samaritan<sup>25</sup> but it carried with it the idea that someone came from another (*allos*) race (*genos*).

<sup>21</sup> See Hebrews 11:13; also Matthew 25:35, 38, 43; 27:7; Acts 17:21; Ephesians 2:12, 19; III John 5.

<sup>22</sup> See Ephesians 2:19; I Peter 2:11; Acts 7:6, 29.

<sup>23</sup> See Hebrews 11:13; I Peter 1:1; 2:11.

<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 11:34; Acts 7:6

<sup>25</sup> Luke 17:18

# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## Unit 5

### *That ALL the Nations Might be Blessed*



## Development Associates International

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# Unit 5 That ALL the Nations Might be Blessed

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Demonstrate from Scripture that God’s call to Abram (Genesis 12) was to bless all the nations and peoples and cultures of the world, and then propose ideas of how you are called to be a “blessing.”
- Evaluate what can go wrong when the “people of God” take his calling as a reason for thinking themselves better than others rather than as a stewardship entrusted to them by God.
- Analyze your own culture, ethnic group, country, or church in an effort to examine ways that you/your groups try to make God into our own “tribal” or nationalistic God.

## Additional Reading for this unit from the textbook:

**“Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility”, Chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 53-74)**

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### *Introduction and Author Note*

Throughout the Bible, God reminds us that his concern is for the redemption of the nations. As we'll see throughout this course, God demonstrates his concern for all people everywhere from the Table of Nations, to the call of Abram, to the election of Israel to bless the nations, and to the missionary expansion of the New Testament Church. Over and over again, the Bible affirms that God's love and forgiveness is for all peoples, tribes, ethnicities, and nations.

The problem is that we who are Christians often fail to see the world with this same breadth of love as God does. You read about my failures in this area when confronted with all of the cultural differences at the conference in Singapore. But the problem is much larger.

The failure to see "all peoples" as recipients of the love and redemptive invitation of God has led the church into many errors through the centuries. Ethnocentrism often leads the people of God to believe that they are superior to other peoples, and this degenerates into a church that can be exclusive, racist, and even oppressive.

Although this is not a course on church history, it's worth remembering that ethnocentricity and exclusivity in the people of God has led to:

- Jonah's hostility towards the Ninevites
- Tensions in the New Testament Church
- Tensions between Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox in many places
- Relationships with Muslim based on anger and violence rather than God's love for them
- An ethnocentric church exporting European Or American culture through colonialism
- An ethnocentric church turning away when indigenous peoples were being oppressed in Australia or in the United States
- An ethnocentric church remaining passive in Germany during the holocaust that killed millions of Jews, Russians, and many others
- An ethnocentric church actually helping to design the Apartheid doctrine of racial separation in South Africa
- An ethnocentric church that at times contributed to the genocide in Rwanda – Burundi in the 1990's.

There are many more tragic examples, but the point of all of these is this: we all need to step back and remember that God's purposes are for everyone everywhere. Before him, every culture and people and ethnicity is equal.

## The Covenant to Abram/Abraham

Answer Box # 0

Read Genesis 12:1-3. This is the first version of God's covenant with and commission to Abram (who becomes Abraham). Summarize these verses in your own words:

God gives the covenant to Abram (Genesis 12:1-3) and promises that he will be a blessing to all peoples or all the nations, but who are the nations and peoples to whom God is he referring? Experts point out that the phrase “nations” refers to human identity based on ethnicity, territory, theology (in other words, the gods or deities worshipped), kingship or other type of leader, and language. Later in the Bible, from the period of Moses and following, the word's distinction gets more specific and could be used to denote clans, tribes, families or households, and individuals. In the book of Genesis, however, the term is less specific.<sup>1</sup>

Old Testament professor Walter Kaiser evaluates the term and explains: “...the sweep of the evidence makes it abundantly clear that God's gift of a blessing through the instrumentality of Abraham was to be experienced by nations, clans, tribes, people groups, and individuals. It would be for every size group, from the smallest people group to the greatest nation.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the Bible uses the word which identifies the broadest definition of peoples or nations highlights God's desire to bless all the peoples of the earth: “it is clear from the Abraham story, and from the use that the New Testament makes of this story, that **God's concern is for the entire created order. People from every conceivable human grouping are called into the people of God.**”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. [The Message of Mission](#) (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Kaiser. [Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations](#) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. [The Message of Mission](#), p. 103.



But this universal desire of God to bless all peoples does not begin with Abram. The covenant with Abram was part of the flow of the first 11 chapters of Genesis:

It would be incorrect to say that Abraham was the first to receive the ‘all peoples’ target for the message of the gospel. Genesis 1-11 was far from being a nationalistic section that favored the Jews. It is one of the most universalistic sections of the Bible ending with a list in Genesis 10 of seventy nations, the very ‘families’ and ‘all peoples’ that were to receive the blessing from God through Abraham and his collective seed in Genesis 12:3.<sup>4</sup>

We need to note here that God’s universal desire to bless the nations is not the equivalent of universalism – the theological belief that everyone will be saved regardless of what they believe. In contrast, Dr. Kaiser notes that, “The expression ‘all peoples’ did not mean that every person on earth would universally believe in the Messiah, but that every ethnic group would receive this blessing of God’s grace and the joy of participating in worshiping and serving him.”<sup>5</sup>

Hays similarly builds on the link between Genesis 10 and the Abrahamic covenant: “Genesis 10 and the Abrahamic promise combine to form a theme that runs throughout Scripture, constantly pointing to the global and multi-ethnic elements inherent in the overarching plan of God.”<sup>6</sup> He integrates the first twelve chapters of Genesis: “... the promise in 12:3 clearly connects back to Genesis 10. The promise to Abraham is the answer to the sin and the scattering of Genesis 3-11.”<sup>7</sup>

The implication of the “all nations” or “all peoples” emphasis in the Abrahamic covenant for our purposes is that it highlights God’s redemptive plan to save and bless individuals from all peoples on earth. God’s revealed plan in Genesis is to reunite the diverse peoples of the earth as the people of God. Therefore, “Racialization or racial division [and we should add ethnocentrism] in the church thwarts the plan of God and is in direct disobedience to this central biblical theme.”<sup>8</sup>

### Think about it

#### Answer Box # 1

If that last statement is true, what are the implications on the way that a Christian organization should operate? What should be different in a Christian organization in terms of a culturally diverse employees, leadership, or relationships?



**learning**

<sup>4</sup> Walter Kaiser. Mission in the Old Testament, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 63.

The Abrahamic calling to bless the nations foreshadows what Jesus will do, but it also reflects God’s ultimate plan for all peoples from the beginning. In Galatians 3:8, Paul refers to the Abrahamic covenant as announcing in advance God’s plan to justify the Gentiles. “Paul is stressing in Galatians 3:8 is that the inclusion and blessing of the nations/Gentiles was not an afterthought, but was 'in the mind and purpose of God when God gave his covenant to Abraham.”<sup>9</sup>

### Think about it

Answer Box # 2

#### Reflection

*Your co-worker Ben is a fellow Christian, but he is very proud of his ethnic Jewish heritage. After you challenge him at work to demonstrate more humility, he writes you an email to explain his actions. He writes, “Sometimes I seem proud because I am a member of the people group that God selected above all the others. I think the favoritism that God showed towards my people justifies my thinking that my people are superior. Don’t you?”*

*How would you respond?*



learning

### The Problem of Israel as the Elect

Unfortunately, Israel’s election and cultural uniqueness developed in latter part of the Old Testament era, when “Judaism as a cultural way of life began to emerge, and the Jews began to define their ethnic boundaries very precisely, and Judaism became quite distinctive.”<sup>10</sup> This sense of exclusivity became a stumbling-block. Rather than being a blessing to all the nations and all other ethnicities, they kept the message of the blessing to God to themselves.

The problem of Israel’s behavior, however, was not the only issue. God’s specific election of the people of Israel presents us with a very significant problem – as Ben illustrates in the previous exercise. The reason that the word *ethne* throughout the Old

<sup>9</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 33.

Testament is translated “Gentiles” rather than “nations” is that Jews saw themselves as God’s chosen people and **every one else** as the “**Other.**” In other words, they saw only two types of people in the world: themselves and everyone else. They were the chosen, and therefore all others were not chosen and therefore inherently inferior, especially in terms of posture before God.

Israel took the unique call of God and twisted it into a sense of superiority over others.

The readers of Deuteronomy were reminded that the heaven, the heaven of heavens and the earth with all that is in it belonged to Yahweh (Deut. 10:4), but there was a constant danger in Israel of Old Testament times, especially because of her sense of being particularly chosen by God, for this view to shrink into something more ethnic and tribal.<sup>11</sup>

The Israelites missed the point. God’s choice of Israel was not because they were greatest or superior (see Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Israel’s election was not to provoke superiority or ethnic pride. Instead, “The election of Israel, far from meaning the rejection of the other nations of the world, was the very means of salvation of the nations. Election was not a call to privilege, but a choosing for service.”<sup>12</sup>

Lesslie Newbegin takes it a step further; reflecting on the rebukes to the people of God in the book of Isaiah, Newbegin observes that God’s chosen are to be a light to people different than themselves (the Gentiles). He says that the Messianic chapters remind us, “Israel has to learn that election is not for comfort and security but for suffering and humiliation.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Concentration on Genesis 12:1-4**

Abram (later Abraham) serves as a prime example of someone who was called on by God to go intentionally across cultures to bring God’s blessing to people who did not know God. Today, we might simply call him a typical missionary. God called him out from one culture to another and from his comfort zone into a world of faith and dependency on God. God promises to bless him, but he has a specific purpose for this blessing which will affect all nations.

Answer Box #3

*How would you explain the term “blessing” to someone else – especially someone unfamiliar with biblical language?*

*In Genesis 11:4, God judges and condemns the people who intended to build the tower of Babel in an effort to “make a name” for themselves, yet here, God promises to make Abram’s name great (12:2). What was the difference?*



**learning**

<sup>11</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. The Message of Mission, p. 130.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Kaiser. Mission in the Old Testament, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Lesslie Newbegin. The Open Secret (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 73.

After the seeking God finds us and restores us to relationship with him, he sends us out. He calls us to himself so that he can – in biblical language – “bless” us, but he does so for a purpose. God blesses us so that we in turn can bless others. He calls us out of our security and comfort to go out to bless others so that “all nations” can receive his blessing.

This is one of several promises of God to Abram, whose name is later changed to Abraham (see Genesis 17:5), concerning his fatherhood of the people of God and God's desire to bless the nations on earth through Abram and his line. To illustrate God's relationship with Abram throughout this study, you're wise to read the other parallel passages (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:1-5; 17:1-8; 18:18-19; 22:15-18) to observe the contrasts and comparisons of the promises.

In the New Testament, Stephen's report on this account (recorded as his sermon to the religious leaders in Acts 7:2ff) indicates that the promise/call was given in Ur and was reiterated in Haran (12:4) after his father died (Acts 7:4). "The land I will show you" would be Canaan, the "Promised Land."

The command to leaving his father's household was a much greater challenge for Abram and Sarai (later called Sarah) than it would be for us today. It meant leaving security and a guaranteed future. It also meant leaving behind the family "gods" (Joshua 24:2 indicates that Terah worshipped heathen gods) and taking the risk of following God alone.

God promises Abram blessings in various forms. He promises a great nation - which meant both land and people (the people of Israel as well as those of us who are children of Abraham by faith (see Romans 4:16-17)). He also promised a great name, which referred to both fame and heirs. The third part of the promise includes protection - to the extent that cursing Abram equaled cursing God. Finally, God promised him a global impact.

What is a "blessing?" Generally speaking, it's something good or desirable. In this passage, we see it manifested in material prosperity (Genesis 13:2; 24:35), God's presence (Genesis 21:22), notoriety before the world (Genesis 23:6), and friendship with God (Isaiah 41:8).

Hebrews 11 adds to our understanding here in that it clarifies that by faith, Abraham was looking to the eternal fulfillment of these promises - to the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 11:10ff).

Contrast Abram with the architects of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). They designed a tower towards heaven to make their own names great.<sup>14</sup> Abram is different. In his case, it was God who would make his name great for the sake of His glory and for the sake of spreading God's blessings to the nations.

Abram exemplifies obedience: "So Abram left, as the Lord told him" (12:4). Lot goes with Abram (12:4-5) possibly to provide an heir to inherit Abram's possessions. God's promises to bless all nations through him. God is not intent on Abram's physical heirs only; such nationalism is "too small a thing" for God (see Isaiah 49:6). Instead, God desires to bless "all peoples on earth" (12:3) or "all nations on earth" (22:18) through him.

### ***Abram's Blessing Applied to Us***

The main point to remember from the covenant God made with Abram is summarized in the phrase "Blessed to be a Blessing." God blesses us so that we in turn can bless others. Abram became the father of all the Hebrew and Arab world

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<sup>14</sup> See the spirit of self-exaltation in Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12-14

through his sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Even greater than that, however, Abram blessed all the nations by becoming the father of those who are justified by faith: compare Genesis 15:6, Romans 4, and Galatians 3:10-14.

Abram and his people lived as nomadic shepherds. They never could have imagined such greatness nor of having an impact on "all nations" (although they might have dreamt of conquering neighboring "nations." God was promising something way beyond Abram's wildest dreams or expectations. But he also was asking for something way outside of Abram's "comfort-zone" - to leave behind family and security and safety.



## learning

### Answer Box # 4

*What cultural 'comfort zones' will you need to leave in order to start befriending or reaching out to those who are different or are outside your own culture? What are the risks? What might you lose?*

The repeated promises of God to Abram as he ventures away from security and towards Canaan (12:7 as well as 13:14-17; 15:1-5; 17:1-8; 18:18-19; 22:15-18) reminds us of God's mercy towards us as we make dangerous and courageous decisions. He addresses our fears by reiterating his promises as we move out.

The blessing/cursing promise provides an Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament "if God be for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31). An expanded understanding of the promise sees Abram as provider of the seed of the Messiah (Galatians 3:10-14). With this in mind, the promise enlarges. The entire world is blessed through Abram's seed, Jesus Christ. Whoever blesses him (Jesus) will be blessed. Whoever curses or rejects him will live under God's curse or condemnation (Romans 6:23; 8:1).

By faith, we are Abram's children (Romans 4). If this to true, then every Christian has been blessed with salvation through Jesus Christ so that all the earth can be blessed through us. This is why Jesus sends us out (John 20:21) to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20), preach the Gospel to all (Mark 16:15), and be his witnesses (Acts 1:8).

### Historical Interlude: Long-term Effects of an Errant Sense of Election

Problems related to a misunderstanding of God's purposes in 'election' carry into our world today. Think about the current nation-state of Israel, regarded by many as equal to the unique and separated people of God and heirs to the Old Testament

promises. The prioritization of Israel as “God’s Chosen” has often resulted in the establishment of a theological foundation which directly states or at least implies that God loves one ethnicity more than another. As a result, Palestinians and other Arabic-speaking peoples get relegated to being second-class citizens at best and “enemies of the people of God” at worst.

As was stated at the start of this course, we are not going to solve political problems here. Any careful observer knows that the Middle Eastern problem is incredibly complex. However, when we look at that strategic area of the world, we look through the biblical lens which tells us that all human beings – Arabs and Jews included – are created in the image of God, and God’s redemptive desire is for all the ethnicities on earth to know and respond to his love.

With this in mind, Israel becomes God’s servant, not “God’s favorite at the expense of others.” Given the wider teaching of the Bible, Israel becomes one of thousands of ethnic specific groups whose dignity needs to be affirmed and who need to be invited to know and respond to God’s love through Jesus Christ.

**Answer Box # 5**

*How does this teaching contrast with things that you were previously taught about Israel or “election.” In what ways does the phrase “blessed to be a blessing” change your perspective on yourself as one who is blessed by the gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ?*

The misapplication of the concept of election occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in South Africa. The doctrine of election of a chosen few became the foundation of Apartheid in South Africa. By applying various promises of the book of Joshua to themselves, the Afrikaner settlers saw themselves as the lost tribes of Israel moving into a land that God had promised them. They experienced Gideon-like victories (celebrated in Pretoria at the Voortrekker Monument), including the famous battle where about 300 Afrikaners circled their wagons and defeated Shaku Zulu’s army of more than 30,000.

They interpreted the historical event as an endorsement of their chosenness, and they went on to see this chosenness as a reason to establish the legal separation of the races, using the Old Testament commands of God to the people of Israel in Canaan as their foundation. Their subjective experiences and their misinterpretation of election resulted in the erection of incredible dividing walls between the races and peoples – dividing walls that Jesus had come to break down (see Ephesians 2:14ff).

## Final Assignment



### Final Assignment

- 1) Read “*Color Blinded*” – an article related to the Church failing to speak on some moral/ethical issue and instead defending the status quo of the majority culture – and reflect on what went wrong and where the church failed.
- 2) For the next three weeks in church, write a critical reflection on ways that you see God being presented as nationalistic or as in favor of the majority culture or as hostile to cultures your culture despises.
- 3) Read and reflect on Psalm 67. This Psalm starts with a prayer for God’s blessing from Numbers 6:24-26, but it combines this plea for blessing with an understanding of God’s global purposes in blessing his people. This Psalm, which constitutes a prayer for an abundant harvest, succinctly repeats the “blessed to be a blessing” theme of God’s promises to Abram. There’s nothing wrong with asking for God’s blessing – as long as we ask it so that others, not just ourselves, are blessed. This Psalm, which constitutes a prayer for an abundant harvest, succinctly repeats the “blessed to be a blessing” theme of God’s promises to Abram. There’s nothing wrong with asking for God’s blessing – as long as we ask it so that others, not just ourselves, are blessed. Read this as a prayer for God to use you as he did Abram.

## Readings



Christianity Today, October 2, 2000 (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/011/2.36.html>)

### **Color-Blinded: Why 11 o'clock Sunday morning is still a mostly segregated hour.**

An excerpt from Divided by Faith by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith

By almost any definition, Debbie, white and 27 years of age, is an evangelical. She holds firmly to the authority of Scriptures, is "born again," evangelizes with her words and actions, gives money for overseas missions, and is active in her church. She recently graduated from an evangelical Bible college and is now training to be a minister of Christian education in her denomination.

Growing up in the "wheat belt," she was sheltered from racial diversity. That changed somewhat when she attended a Bible college that was located downtown in a large city. However, she only saw this diversity from a distance, in passing; her schoolmates were nearly all white, and she spent most of her time with them.

We met for an interview in a restaurant on a Saturday morning. Throughout our discussion, she was very open and friendly, candidly stating her thoughts. When asked if she thought our country has a race problem, she matter-of-factly said, "I think we make it a problem."

The only race problem Debbie sees is one of misinterpretation. In the normal course of interpersonal communication, conflicts arise. When this occurs between individuals of different races, it is incorrectly assumed to be a race issue.

Did Debbie think there was a race problem beyond this? Yes, she said, there are times when problems genuinely occur between races, or actually between individuals of different races. To her, this happens when someone is "biased against a person solely for their race." This is due, in her view, to some people's ignorance, and is inexcusable for Christians.

Mary, a 28-year-old white mother of two, is also strongly evangelical. A college graduate, Mary is now a full-time homemaker and lives a comfortable middle-class life with her husband, a professional. Reared in Vermont, and now living in another Northeastern state, she has been relatively isolated from racial diversity.

Nestled in Mary's comfortable living-room chairs, we turned to the subject of race relations. "Mary, do you think our country has a race problem?"

I think so. This may sound really bad, but I think it is more going the other way. I mean we have tried for 30 years to become a unified nation and now it is a big black push to be separate again. You know, like the Million Man March was for separation. It is very frustrating.

Mary went on to discuss her frustration with the individual-level prejudice she sees from a few whites including her father, who did not speak to her sister for years after her marriage to an African American. But not supporting or engaging in such actions herself, she neither agrees with such people nor sees such thoughts and actions as the center of the race problem. For her, the race problem is now primarily the result of "separatists" and a liberal emphasis on diversity programs. By emphasizing diversity and the race issue itself, she believes, we create deeper division, which would lessen if left alone.



Debbie and Mary, like the large majority of white evangelicals we interviewed, only talked about race issues when we asked them directly about the race problem. For most white evangelicals, race was compartmentalized. They most certainly had thoughts about the race issue and their thoughts are shaped at least in part by their faith, but the race issue in no way dominates their thinking. Race is not a focal point in their day-to-day lived experience.

### ***The other side***

Otis, an African-American evangelical in his early 40s who attends a Pentecostal church, presents a strong contrast to Debbie and Mary. Otis began bringing race issues and race examples into the conversation very early in our interview. In fact, we actually never asked Otis any of our prepared race questions because he addressed them all in the course of answering other questions.

Early in the interview, we asked him a general question about Christian influence on society. For Otis, not enough Christians were living like Christians, at least outside their homes, and communities were not organized around Christian principles. We asked him what signs of this he saw in the community.

To get a good job or a good promotion in his city, Otis says, the level of formal education a person has is not nearly as important as being part of the good old boy system. He says he sees people and businesses take advantage of vulnerable people, such as single mothers, because they do not have enough clout. They are outside the network of power. He also sees racial segregation in many forms: "In this town, the most segregated hour is 11 o'clock on Sunday morning. And not only that, even when 5 o'clock comes, the people leave their jobs, they pick up the same way of thinking."

He brought up a school debate going on in many communities nationwide. Should schools be integrated at the cost of busing long distances? Or should children go to local schools, even if that means segregation? Otis at first sounds like many white Americans in his response to the issue: "I don't think a kid from one end of the county should be bused to the other. I'm sorry, I can't go along with that."

But Otis's next words take a different direction:

I can't go along with segregation either. For example, say on the west side of town scores are higher, so everyone wants to send their kids to that school. But because a kid is on that side, and the school is located on that side, the only way you can go to that school is because you live over there. To me, that's discrimination and segregation. That's just the society we live in.

"What do you think committed Christians should do about these things?" we asked.

"The only way you're going to do it is through prayer. But we also have a moral obligation to speak out whenever possible. Let them know where you stand. And not be a part of it. Don't lend a hand to the situation."

Off tape, after the formal interview had ended, Otis recounted many serious incidents of discrimination he had experienced. He shared incidents from his youth, such as the things he saw done by the Ku Klux Klan. He talked about his difficult times in the Army, where he was often treated viciously by superiors, made to do more work, not promoted, insulted and ridiculed more than others, or simply ignored. And he talked about his life since the Army, where he sees and experiences segregation,

discrimination, and inequality. Despite all the personal turmoil he has experienced on account of his race, he tells himself it is not individual people, but Satan warping systems and people to harm one another.

Wilfred, an American Indian and a new Christian living in a large West Coast city, also has much to say about the race problem. Though our study focused on black-white relations, we include his story to illustrate the larger dynamics shaping people's assessments of race relations.

When we asked Wilfred if he thinks our country has a race problem, he laughed. The obviousness of the question strikes him as funny. A former drug dealer, he is currently homeless. Since his religious conversion, a true metamorphosis has occurred.

Refusing to make money through criminal activity, having few marketable skills, and carrying a burden for his former "associates" and "clients," Wilfred spends many of his days walking the streets of the poor neighborhoods where he used to deal drugs. He works occasional day jobs and spends the rest of his time using whatever tactics he can to keep people from buying and selling drugs including scaring young kids away, acting as a secret informant to the police, and witnessing to drug runners about the need to turn their lives around.

Nearly every day, he said, especially on the bus, he will hear, "Hey chief," meant as a slur on his heritage, often followed by "Go back to the rez." Sometimes this is the opening of a verbal or physical challenge. A few weeks before our interview, three young men accosted Wilfred while he was walking down the street. They called him "chief" and told him they had come to cut his pony tail. They then proceeded to beat him. At the time of the interview, Wilfred was still showing many of the bruises and a black eye from the pummeling.

Being attacked by young, poor men, though certainly painful, is almost understandable to him. His other experiences based on race hurt more. More than once, after putting in a day's work, he has been offered alcohol (once in the form of mouthwash) as his pay. Because he is American Indian, he said, people assume that alcohol is more than fair compensation for his day's labor.

Wilfred has also had rough experiences with the police. Walking late at night, he was stopped by the police and told to get in the squad car. He was then taken to an alley, commanded to get out and put his hands on the squad car, and interrogated, complete with racial slurs, about a crime he did not commit. He then suffered a blow to the back of his head and was told to walk away without looking back.

But he sees these isolated events as simply part of a system. To be an American Indian, he said, is to be "on the bottom of the ladder" with blacks. To be an American Indian or an African American means a history of being dealt with harshly, being denied jobs, living in rural or urban ghettos, growing up (as he did) without parents, being poor, being expected to achieve little, and ultimately, he said, accepting and becoming what others expect of you. The race problem is painfully real to him. It is complex, involving actions both by individuals and the larger community. It is people, it is policies, it is our society.

### ***Rigid individualism***

The responses of these four people embody much of what we heard from evangelicals on the race issue, with Debbie's and Mary's attitudes most common among whites. Debbie and Mary take a benign view of the race problem. From Debbie's

perspective, much of what gets labeled "the race problem" merely represents inevitable disagreements between fallen human beings. For Mary, the race problem would disappear if it were not for separatists dividing the nation.

From the perspectives of Otis and Wilfred, the race problem is very much alive. Permeating most aspects of society like the air they breathe, it may never die.

Why do we find these disparate perspectives?

For most white evangelicals, the race problem is one or more of three main types:

- 1) Prejudiced individuals, resulting in bad relationships and sin.
- 2) Other groups - usually African Americans - trying to make race problems a group issue from nothing more than individual problems.
- 3) Self-interested groups - often African Americans again, but also the media, the government, or liberals - who fabricate problems.

The view that prejudiced individuals are the essence of the race problem of course reflects a focus on the individual as opposed to larger social units. As a Presbyterian man said, "I think our country has a perceived race relations problem. I think that we have individuals still that have race relation problems. I don't think that the country has in its current form a race relation problem."

Individualism and defective personal relationships were constants in evangelicals' assessment of the race problem. We could marshal literally hundreds of quotes substantiating this. For many, the race problem, no matter how big or how small, ultimately came down not to a social issue but to personal defects of some individuals in some groups as they attempted to relate to each other.

### ***Different realities***

Because evangelicals distrust basic human propensities (as the result of the doctrine of original sin), they see humans, if they are not rooted in proper interpersonal contexts, as tending to make wrong choices. For evangelicals, relationalism (a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships) derives from the view that human nature is fallen and that salvation and Christian maturity can only come through a "personal relationship with Christ." It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of this relationship for evangelicals. It is a bedrock, nonnegotiable belief.

As interviewers, we were struck by how racially homogenous the social worlds of most evangelicals are, particularly those of white respondents. Other than an occasional acquaintance, they had few interracial contacts. With a few notable exceptions, none lived in worlds that were not at least 90 percent white in their daily experience. Many commented on this while answering the race questions. It was common for the respondents to speak of being sheltered, unexposed to racial diversity, insulated, in their own small world.

This isolation is important sociologically. Because the vast majority of white evangelicals do not directly witness individual-level prejudice (with the exception of some relatives who used the "N" word occasionally), the race problem simply cannot be as

large an issue as some make it to be. Granted it was a problem in the past, and a residue may remain today because original sin remains, but the race problem is not severe in their estimation.

The white evangelicals we interviewed do not want a race problem. They want people to get along and to have equal opportunity. They see these as essential to living out their faith. In short, they yearn for colorblind people. This is the contemporary white American evangelical perspective.

Black evangelicals tend to see the racial world very differently. Ironically, evangelicalism's cultural tools (ideas, habits, skills, and styles) lead people in different social and geographical realities to assess the race problem in divergent and nonreconciliatory ways. This large gulf in understanding is perhaps part of the race problem's core, and most certainly contributes to the entrenchment of the racialized society.

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# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## *Unit 6*

### *What do we do with the Past?*



## Development Associates International

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# Unit 6 - What do we do with the Past?

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Compare the ethnicity lessons we learn from Jonah with challenges that you might face in your own context.
- Evaluate the intensity of ethnic issues related to history, hatred, stereotypes, and forgiveness in the story of Jonah, and then review these in your own situation.
- Compare yourself and your culture with real stories in Christian history of those who forgave their historical oppressors.

### Additional Reading for this unit from the textbook:

**“Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility”, Chapters 6 and 7 (pp. 77-99)**

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### *Introduction & Author's Note*

One of the problems in writing a course like this is that I am an American. America is a very young culture and country compared to the other cultures and nations on earth. As a result, we have very little sense of history. Add to this the fact that American culture is very future-oriented; we tend to look more towards where we are going than where we have come from. Ignorance of the past and pre-occupation with the future leaves many Americans unable to confront things like our history of slavery or of genocide against the native peoples of America.

In contrast to our American mindset, an Egyptian friend of mine is a member of a family that has stayed Christian even through the Islamic invasions of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. With a family history and memory that goes back almost 1500 years, it's no wonder he has some difficulties reaching out to Moslems. Similarly, tensions in Serbia and Bosnia in 1989 were provoked by hostilities between Christian and Moslems that went back 600 years. The phenomena known as "collective memory" had fostered bitterness and hatred for many generations.

The limits of my collective memory means that we will draw heavily on the experiences of others in this Unit – ranging from biblical characters like Joseph and Jonah, to contemporary figures who have survived genocide in Rwanda or Apartheid in South Africa. To begin, let me introduce you to Maung from Myanmar (Burma).

At a conference in Yangon, the capital city, Maung and others from the north had come for training in evangelism. Maung lived in an area dominated by the people group known as the "Karen" people, an ethnic minority in northern Myanmar and several of the neighboring countries. On the last day of the evangelism training, we were set to go into the city to do some street preaching and witnessing.

Maung refused. He folded his arms defiantly and said, "I am not going." We asked him why. He explained that he was from the "Karen" people and that the majority of the people in the city were from the Burmese people. He went on: "For many years, the Burmese have oppressed and persecuted my people, the Karen. If I go into the city and witness for Jesus, a Burmese might become a Christian. If he becomes a Christian, then he will go to heaven when he dies. I do not want any Burmese in heaven, so I am not going witnessing!"

## Answer Box #0

*How would you counsel Maung?*

*In your own family or ethnic group's collective memory, who might be the equivalent to the Burmese (i.e., people that are so badly hated you don't want them in heaven)?*



### What do we do with history?

Daniel Bourdanne writes from experience in inter-ethnic conflicts across French-speaking Africa; he has identified the incredible power of history and built-up hatred to create havoc. He observes, “The wild cat of ethnicism prowls in the darkness of many a heart and comes out from time to time to haunt and destroy our people.”<sup>1</sup>

Miroslav Volf, whose book *Exclusion and Embrace*<sup>2</sup> was written from the former Yugoslavia following the Serbian attempts to exterminate all others, articulates the power of memory to heal and to provoke further hostility. In the article, “*Truthfulness, Therapy, Exemplarity*,”<sup>3</sup> he writes, “Memories are life-preserving and they are deadly.” He goes on to articulate four steps towards redemptive memory. He says that to heal the past, we must

- 1) Remember truthfully
- 2) Remember therapeutically

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Bourdanne, ed., *Le Tribalisme en Afrique*, (Presses Biblique Africaines (2002) p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Miroslav Volf. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Oneness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> An unpublished paper presented April 2005 at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, CT.



- 3) Remember so as to learn from the past
- 4) Remember in a redeeming way.

How can we respect and honor the past without letting it dominate the future and especially our future relationship with people outside of our group?

### **South Africa: a Story of Forgiveness:**

A black South African lady's son was killed by the Apartheid regime. Later her husband was imprisoned, where he was later killed and his body burned. During the rebuilding of South Africa after Apartheid, the details of her son's and father's deaths became known, and she was brought face to face with her son's and husband's murderer. At the trial, the woman was asked by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission if she had anything to say. She replied,

"Yes, I have three requests. The first one is. Will someone take me to the riverbank and help me gather those ashes so I can give my husband a fitting burial?"

"Secondly," she said, "I would ask you [the court] to sentence this man to be my son and to come to the ghetto where I live once a month and spend several days with me and let me pour on him the love I would have given my son.

"Third," she said, "would somebody come and lead me across the hall so I can put my arms around this man and tell him it is because of Jesus that I forgive him"?<sup>4</sup>

### **History and Ethnic Diversity**

History is necessary because it helps us know where we've come from, but it is also painful because it gives us reason to hate those who have hurt us, oppressed us, or caused pain to our ancestors – especially those who are not from our group. For healing to occur and collective memories to be forgiven, we must deal with the past. One assortment of articles on this subject, *The Finest Robe, the Essential Vision: Reconciliation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*,<sup>5</sup> underscores the important **role of truthful confession of history in reconciling enemies**. The idea that the authors get across pertains to the healing of history. In so doing, "The universal religion of revenge is overcome and the universal law of retaliation is annulled,"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Recounted by Myron Augsburger in "Sharing the Reconciliation of Grace," in *The Finest Robe, the Essential Vision: Reconciliation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the 2002 compendium of the "Brandywine Forum". St. Davids, PA: The Institute for Global Engagement and Eastern University, 2002, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> This is the compendium of the "Brandywine Forum". St. Davids, PA: The Institute for Global Engagement and Eastern University, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Bob Seiple, quoting Jurgen Moltman commenting on Jesus prayer of forgiveness on the cross, p. 6.

**Think about it**



**learning**

Answer Box # 2

*What do you remember about the story of Jonah? Before re-reading it, write down as many of the facts of his life as you can recall.*

Perhaps the best character to help us identify the issue of “collective memory” especially as it relates to reaching out to our historical enemies is Jonah.

Answer Box # 3

*Why did Jonah run away? Go back and read the story if you need to in order to discover what the main problem was for him.*

**Introduction to Jonah**

*What are the implications of the book of Jonah in our call to go across cultures and ethnicities to proclaim the love of God through Jesus Christ to our world?* Some people associate Jonah with fear. God called him to preach to the people of Nineveh, his violent and hated neighbors. But Jonah ran the other way. It wasn't Jonah's fear of the Ninevites that made him run. He feared that God might have mercy on people he wanted condemned.

We know Jonah because of his rebellion against God and the three-day excursion in the belly of a great fish (although we hear of “Jonah and the whale”, the Bible only refers to a great fish (1:17)). Called to Nineveh, Jonah runs (chapter 1), repents in the belly of the fish (chapter 2), obeys God and preaches in Nineveh (chapter 3) and then resents God's mercy (chapter 4).

“The object of the book of Jonah seems to have been to correct the extreme form of Jewish nationalism which then prevailed, and to proclaim the mercy of God for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews.”<sup>7</sup>

The Book of Jonah is arguably the most specific Old Testament text for rebuking ethnocentricity and pointing out God’s love for all peoples – in this case, Jonah’s archenemies, the Ninevites. Jonah establishes perhaps the ultimate case study of dealing with the hostile “other” from a combative, historically hated other ethnic group.

## Background

Jonah is a Jewish prophet, son of Amittai, from the city called Gathheper in Zebulun (II Kings 14:25), about three miles from Nazareth. He lives in the period 825-782 BC, under the reign of Jereboam II (II Kings 14:27) in the northern Kingdom, before the great exile. His contemporaries were prophets like Joel, Hosea, and Amos.

In his time, Israel hated Assyria, the empire in which Nineveh was the capital; Nineveh sat on the Tigris River, near the modern-day city of Mosul, Iraq. Assyria had stood for 300 years as a brutally militaristic empire known and hated by all its West Asian neighbors for its violence, conquests, and reputation for cannibalizing defeated foes.

J. B. Pritchard’s describes in great detail the exploits of Assyrian kings. They conquered armies, took captives, piled up booty, beheaded other kings and impaled them on pikes. Stories include vast fields filled with corpses and conquered cities burned to the ground.<sup>8</sup>

Peskett and Ramachandra describe Nineveh as “the world-gobbling Assyrian empire, one of the cruelest and most rapacious empires of the ancient world.” They go on in an effort to help us understand the truly counter-cultural calling on Jonah to go to these people: “It is perhaps difficult for us to feel the resonances the word ‘Nineveh’ had for a pious Jew. We need to think of some words, names of people or places, which arouse in our minds and hearts today; possible words may be Hitler, Pol Pot, Stalin, Hutu/Tutsi, Auschwitz. Cali, Srebrnica, Chechnya, Saddam Hussein.”<sup>9</sup>

Jonah sails from Joppa (modern day Jaffa - about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem) towards Tarshish, what scholars identify as the city of Tartessus in southwestern Spain – a city over 2000 miles from Jonah’s home and in the opposite direction of Nineveh. We don’t know (in chapters 1 and 2) exactly why he ran – other than the fact that he “ran away from the Lord” (1:3). Fear of Ninevites seems at first to be the logical reason.

When the storm rises, Jonah, in contrast to the panicking sailors, falls into a deep sleep during the storm. It could have been the sleep of depression because Jonah, a prophet, was now out of work. Maybe he didn’t care if the ship sank. On the other hand, it could be the sleep of denial. Perhaps getting on the boat was not escape enough from God, so Jonah ran away even further through his sleep.

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<sup>7</sup> W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1972), 159.

<sup>8</sup> J. B. Pritchard. Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 274-317

<sup>9</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. The Message of Mission (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), p. 125.

They call Jonah to prayer, we don't know if he prayed. His own understanding of his relationship with God would have rendered his prayers useless because he knew that conscious sin like his flight to Tarshish separated him from talking to God (Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:2).

The lot gets cast – an ancient means of divination like throwing dice – to identify the person responsible for the storm, and it falls to Jonah. He offers his testimony about his God (1:9) and reiterates something he apparently told them earlier – that he was a fugitive from God (1:10).

As the seas rise, Jonah shows his capacity for mercy by offering a prompt solution: throw me into the sea (1:11). Even in Jonah's disobedience, God uses him to bring these pagan sailors start to call on the name of Jonah's God (1:14) and they offer a sacrifice (1:16).

Jonah's prayer vividly describes the experiences of someone who had almost drowned ("heart of the seas", "currents," "waves," "breakers," "engulfing waters," "seaweed"). The theme of his prayer focuses on:

- God's compassion: he is near to the needy.
- God's use of hardships (note "*your waves and breakers*" (2:3)) to bring us to himself, an important truth for any of us who ever ask, "Why does God/has God let me go through these things?" God uses pain to get our attention!
- God's love in spite of how we feel, because circumstances can make us feel like God has abandoned us.
- God's mercy: God still redeems. Salvation comes from the Lord!

Jonah 2:9 is Jonah saying, "If you get me out of here, I'll go to Nineveh. He makes his "vows" under pressure. After being rescued, Jonah obeys (3:3). He goes to Nineveh. Keep in mind the inconvenience. He was sailing in comfort to Tarshish, asleep in the boat. To get to Nineveh, Jonah had to travel over 500 miles over land, desert, and mountains. He would have had many opportunities to re-consider, rationalize, and run again – but he went.

Nineveh and the surrounding metropolitan region was a huge city, three days walk across. Jonah declares the message of warning and judgment: "In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed" (3:4). The Assyrian Empire, proud and haughty, represented heathen defiance against the God of Israel, but here, they listen to Jonah. His succinct message affects everyone, all the way up to the king who declares a fast for repentance. From a prophetic perspective – especially in contrast to some of his peers – Jonah succeeds. (It's worth noting that the Assyrians later returned to their pride and God destroyed Nineveh in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC; but here, they repent.)

### **Jonah and the Battle with Ethnocentricity**

Jonah was in a battle with his own ethnocentrism and ethnic hatred:

Clearly Jonah was eager to go and prophesy God's blessing on Israel in the time of King Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25 is the only other time Jonah is mentioned in the Old Testament), but a revival in Assyria was not what *he* viewed to be in the best interest of the only people God should be interested in – Israel. Jonah did not realize the

universality of Yahweh's purpose and compassion. Jonah did not realize that the basis of a relationship with Yahweh is obedience to his will, which goes beyond all ethnic distinctions.”<sup>10</sup>

Another indication of Jonah's ethnic hatred of the Ninevites pertains to the way he interprets his own message in Jonah 3. Jonah's five-word Hebrew sermon – “Forty more days and Nineveh – overthrown” – has two possible meanings: “The writer has cleverly used a word (‘overthrown’) that can be taken two ways: either it means ‘flattened by judgment’; or it can mean ‘turned upside down’ and refer to an astonishing change of heart and life.”<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, Jonah's fury over the second option being fulfilled reveals that he had “no concern for that great city” (Jonah 4:11). His only desire was that his enemies be flattened. When they repent and God relents, Jonah resents!

Though there are a number of other Old Testament illustrations of God's desire for the redemption of all the nations and peoples, I'll conclude my Old Testament discussion with Jonah because it best illustrates the radical transformation we're trying to affect in people when we start confronting ethnocentrism – especially when that ethnocentrism carries with it (as Jonah did) the hatred of the “other.” Jonah didn't run to Tarshish because he was afraid of the Ninevites. He ran because he was afraid of the mercy of God and what it might imply both for the Ninevites and for his desire to avenge his people (see Jonah 4: 1ff).

Jonah illustrates the challenge of affirming ethnic identity but combating ethnic superiority. It will require a huge dosage of the mercy of God, a desire to see even our enemies forgiven, and a willingness to open our arms to people we've either been separated from because of racism or because of historical hatred.

God's second call gets gentler, although Jonah's message is harsh. Perhaps God knew Jonah's hatred of the Ninevites so he invited him to a call to condemn Nineveh (1:3). But Jonah knew God's character (4:2), which God substantiates by having mercy and sparing Nineveh and its people (3:10).

Jonah 4:2 relates the real reason Jonah ran. John Piper writes:

<Jonah> tried to run away because he knew God would be gracious to the people and forgive them. The point of the book is not the fish. It's about missions and racism and ethnocentrism. The point is this: be merciful like God, not miserly like Jonah. For Jonah ‘be merciful’ meant to be a missionary.<sup>12</sup>

Jonah 4:5 implies that Jonah was still longing for God's judgment on Nineveh. He sat on the hill and watched – hoping for the hellfire and brimstone to fall as it had on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24).

God's mercy in this book is not just for the Ninevites but for Jonah as well. God takes care of Jonah by teaching him through these parables. God provides the plant for protection, but he sends the worm and the wind to remind Jonah and us that he cares more for our growth than he does for our comfort.

Our love for our enemies must flow from our understanding of God's mercy towards us.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Anthony Peart. Separate No More: Understanding and Developing Racial Reconciliation in Your Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. The Message of Mission, p. 129.

<sup>12</sup> John Piper. Let the Nations be Glad (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 188.

## Personal Reflection from Jonah

Even though the main purpose of the story of Jonah is to illustrate that God wants all people to be invited to His mercy regardless of their ethnicity or their past mistakes, Jonah provides for us a story within the story. God's mercy is not just to the Ninevites but to Jonah as well. God is the God of the second, and third, and fiftieth, and five-hundredth chance!! When we rebel against God, there may be time needed for healing, but God does not abandon us. The words, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time" remind us of God's mercy.

## Two Big Lessons From Jonah

Jonah's story answers two basic questions concerning how God's mercy calls us out to reach to those who are culturally or ethnically different from ourselves. This can include (like Jonah with the Ninevites) those we have historical animosity towards. Or it might simple mean those who are "Other" to us.

First, Jonah speaks to the question, "Do I have to love every person before I reach out to them?" Jonah's answer is "No. All we need is to know God's mercy ourselves."

A missionary preparing for Bible translation with an ethnic group in West Africa was asked, "How did you come to love these people?" The man shocked the audience by replying, "I don't love these people."

Then he continued, "I know that Jesus loves me, and Jesus loves these people, and I pray that I'll come to love them. But I'm not going because I love them. I'm going because I've experienced God's mercy through Jesus Christ, and I want them to have the same opportunity to receive God's mercy in Christ."

The second question Jonah answers goes like this: "What do we do with the past? The mercy of God never gives us the freedom to withhold the good news of the Gospel from people – no matter how much they've hurt us or our forefathers. The people of Nineveh were condemned already – just as people without Christ have no savior to cover their sins. Jonah illustrates that unless the messengers of God go, the people will have no chance at all. God does not send Jonah simply to condemn, but in compassion, God sends Jonah in order to give people under judgment the opportunity to respond, repent, and be saved. God is compassionate and longs for repentant sinners to respond to His love.



**learning**

Answer Box # 3

### **Think back on Your Own Life:**

*Think of your own ethnic heritage. Are there any people or nations that you have been raised to hate or at least stereotype in a negative light? Ask God to use the story of Jonah to help you understand his love for all peoples.*

**Into the New Testament: Romans 12:14-21<sup>13</sup>**

Why does Paul tell us to forgive our enemies?

- 1) Forgiveness may break a cycle of retaliation and lead to mutual reconciliation.
- 2) It may make the enemy feel ashamed and change his ways.
- 3) Returning evil for evil hurts you just as much as it hurts your enemy. Even if he never repents, forgiving him will free you of a heavy load of bitterness. For loving our enemies in this way, we will be like our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us while we were in a state of rebellion against him.

Answer Box # 4

**Further Reflection:**

*Jesus illustrates to the disciples that his mercy transcends cultural and ethnic stereotypes through his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Read this passage (John 4:1-26) and compare Jesus' responses to the culturally alienated Samaritan woman to Jonah's outreach to the Ninevites. Now pray in the week ahead for eyes of mercy to see at least one culturally alienated person as God sees them, no matter what past hurt might be present.*



**learning**

**A Story of Forgiveness from Cambodia:**

Sokreaksa Himm (known as “Reaksa” to his friends) saw 14 of his family members killed during the genocide that ravaged Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge in the early 1970’s. His book, *Tears of My Soul*<sup>14</sup>, tells the story of his conversion, his healing through counseling for “post-traumatic stress disorder” and his subsequent decision to return to Cambodia, find his family’s killers, and forgive them. In an email interview (May 22, 2005), he responded to some questions about healing of past hurts. He offered his answers so that we in this course can learn from his experiences.

<sup>13</sup> Notes from the *Life Application Bible* (Wheaton:Tyndale, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> Sokreaksa Himm, *Tears of My Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2003).

Question to Reaksa: Can forgiveness and healing come for the oppressed without a time away from the oppressors (i.e., the way that you left Cambodia before returning or the way that Old Testament Joseph was away from his brothers – even after he met them again)?

Answer: Absolutely, forgiveness brings emotional healing.

Question to Reaksa: Related to this, how have those who stayed in Cambodia found forgiveness and healing? Has healing come to those who stayed in the company of oppressors?

Answer: It is hard to answer this specific question. For me, if no forgiveness, no healing will take place.

Question to Reaksa: Can reconciliation happen when the offender does not confess or acknowledge guilt?

Answer: In my second book, here is what I wrote in my introduction in the chapter on reconciliation. “Reconciliation can never take place if forgiveness is not first granted. No-one in the world would wake up one morning and decide to search for their family’s killers and begin to build up a relationship with them. It would be relatively easy for each one of us to deliver a message of forgiveness to a far-distant offender but coming face to face with them would be an entirely different scenario, especially when the hurt was so deep. No one could predict the emotional outcome of an individual when coming to face to face with such an offender.”

Question to Reaksa: In Cambodia, how can you tell the difference between lasting peace and forgiveness between peoples versus what one author calls "hatred that is sleeping"?

Answer: In Cambodian culture, people live with suppression. They do not like to talk about their emotional problems. It is hard to tell about the peace and hatred. It is difficult to identify the two faces. Actually, it is the same, but when anger erupts, we can tell their hatred from their behavior.

Answer Box # 5

*Think of yourself as Jonah. Who would be the Ninevites in your life? What does Jonah’s story teach us about needs to be the core motivation for “loving our enemies”? Action: Is there any person that you’re afraid God will call you to love? Pray for God’s heart of compassion to help you overcome your fears.*



**learning**



## Final Assignment



**application**

Final Assignment

- 1) Meet with people in your cultural context who are considered minorities and
  - a. Ask them how they are treated by the majority culture
  - b. Learn about their history and any feelings of animosity that they might have towards the majority culture
  - c. Write down your thoughts about these interactions, focusing specifically on how talking with them had an impact on your feelings towards them.
- 2) Read “Healing Genocide” and reflect in the notes how you would have responded if you were on either side of the story – oppressor or oppressed

## Readings

Christianity Today, April 2004



**reading**

### Healing Genocide

*Ten years after the slaughter, Rwandans begin to mend their torn nation with a justice that is both biblical and African.*

By Timothy C. Morgan<sup>15</sup>

In Rwanda, evil has a name, an address, and a bunk bed. At the Kigali Central Prison entrance, a 10-foot strand of twine and an elderly Rwandan armed with a rifle are the only bars to entry. Deo Gashagaza, Prison Fellowship Rwanda’s executive director, drives up to the lush hillside entrance and the guard lowers the string, waving us through. The Ministry of Justice has granted CHRISTIANITY TODAY a rare day pass to visit this prison in Rwanda’s capital.

Inside the five-acre prison complex is an astonishing sight for a Westerner’s eyes: 5,056 men, 96 percent accused of genocidal butchery, dressed in pink. About 85,000 individuals, known as genocidaires, are imprisoned nationwide in a country a little smaller than the state of Maryland. Thousands of others are in so-called solidarity camps, where they prepare to re-enter civilian life, minus the infamous ID cards marking them as Hutu or Tutsi.

Four large warehouses ring the prison’s large courtyard. The size of a football field, the courtyard is a mass of male humanity. Using buckets, they wash each other in the open air. A kitchen crew cooks bean porridge over a wood fire in hot tub-

<sup>15</sup> Timothy C. Morgan is deputy managing editor of Christianity Today. Copyright © 2004 Christianity Today. April 2004, Vol. 48, No. 4, Page 76

sized aluminum pots. Others weave baskets to be sold on the open market, or repair shoes. One teacher-inmate instructs prisoners in how to read and write in English.

The warehouses, where each inmate has a tiny bunk, are dank with human sweat. Laundry hangs in the rafters. The only illumination comes from several naked light bulbs. In the infirmary, skilled medical intervention and modern drugs are almost nonexistent. Sick inmates, including two in diabetic comas, lie on wood pallets and await whatever care may come their way, or a rapid and painful death.

I traveled for a week through Rwanda last year, seeking to understand what the genocidaires did, and how Christians, ten years after the slaughter, are pursuing reconciliation. I spent time with government officials, survivors, nurses, doctors, missionaries, former soldiers, and pastors. The price in lost lives and lost opportunities has been extraordinarily high for this nation, but a new space for healing is being created in a uniquely biblical and African way.

### ***Administering Mass Justice***

"We killed our people. The physical genocide was a reaction to spiritual genocide, spiritual emptiness," Emmanuel Kolini, the Anglican archbishop and Rwanda's most influential Protestant, told me as we talked at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Kigali. "Some people don't think sin is real. Rwanda is a witness. Sin is real. It is bitter. It's a fire. Rwanda has helped me understand the depth and weight of sin."

The roots of Rwanda's ethnic bloodletting run deep. During colonial rule, Westerners gave preferential treatment to Tutsis in education and skilled jobs. Hutus resented it deeply. A 1959 coup deposed the Tutsi monarchy, leading to Hutu majority rule. That set off decades of bloody reprisal and counter-reprisal. Tens of thousands of Tutsi and Hutu slaughtered each other with few consequences.

In 1990, Tutsi soldiers based in Uganda launched a civil war against the Hutu-controlled government. After four years of fighting, Tutsi and Hutu leaders prepared to share power. But on April 6, 1994, a jet carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana was hit by a missile that killed all on board. (No one has been charged with that assassination, but Hutus suspected Tutsis.) Within hours, a well-organized retaliation against Tutsis began. During the next 100 days, Hutu militias, government soldiers, and everyday Rwandans slaughtered Tutsis and moderate Hutus (all told, about 8,000 a day) with machetes, hand grenades, farming tools, arson, and bulldozers. The killing stopped only when the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took control of the country on July 4, 1994.

In the aftermath, Rwanda's criminal justice system was overwhelmed. More than 100,000 genocidaires were crammed into 19 prisons. At first, Rwanda attempted to place the accused on trial. But during one two-year period, more genocidaires died of disease in prison than were tried. Also, Rwanda's execution of 22 genocidaires by firing squad in public triggered international outrage. Critics said the executions would only bring about more ethnic reprisal. In the meantime, the number of Rwandans on death row continued climbing. Rwandans who sought some measure of justice were caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place.

### ***A 'Third Way'***

A short time after the genocide, Desmond Tutu, then the Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, visited Rwanda and publicly called for mercy for the genocidaires. He championed restorative justice as a "third way" between so-called victor's justice that harshly punishes the guilty and the temptation of national amnesia.

Tutu's suggestion offered Rwandan Christians a third way. It is a way reaching into their cultural past as well as stepping into an uncertain future. In 1999, the Rwandan government, realizing that it was impossible to bring so many killers to a Western-style trial, revived Gacaca, the precolonial court system. It's named after the grassy area where village elders would gather to settle disputes. The Gacaca system supplements the nation's other courts and the U.N. genocide tribunal (headquartered in Tanzania). Gacaca is perhaps the largest modern-day experiment in using community courts to determine the fate of genocidal felons.

In some aspects, Gacaca echoes the methods of Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, put into place after black-majority rule was implemented in South Africa. That panel had the legal authority to grant full amnesty, provided officials and other individuals admitted guilt and sought forgiveness.

Tutu's conceptual framework for justice and reconciliation, spelled out in his influential book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, is African and scriptural. South Africa's Zulus have a proverb: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("A person is a person through persons"). Tutu uses the word *ubuntu* ("compassionate human interaction") and other African cultural concepts to develop a theology in which personhood is anchored in community. "A self-sufficient human being is subhuman," the now-retired Tutu writes in a related book, *Reconciliation*. "God has made us so that we will need each other. We are made for a delicate network of interdependence."

Meg Guillebaud, a British missionary who trains Rwandan clergy, echoes that theme. "In the old days, no individual was ever considered to have committed an offense. It was regarded as being committed by the whole family." The families of an offender and a victim would assemble before village elders to determine the facts as well as restitution.

For minor crimes, one family would extend *imbabazi*, the word in Kinyarwanda (the indigenous language of Rwanda) for mercy. It literally means "a place where you would receive all the love and care a mother would give." In more serious offenses, mercy was not feasible and relations between families would be severed.

Guillebaud-author of *Rwanda: The Land that God Forgot?*-said Western missionaries usually emphasize individual guilt and the individual's need to repent. As a result, the Rwandan family-based means for restoring relationships was lost. "Hebrew thought forms are much more like Africans' in their stress on family responsibility," she says. The narrative of Joshua 7-the stoning of Achan, his family, and possessions for theft-provides Western Christians a point of reference for better understanding the African cultural context.

She says African Evangelistic Enterprise is training Christians in how to cooperate with the Gacaca courts as well as church-based reconciliation efforts. "Right through the land are large roadside signs about Gacaca: 'Tell what you know. Admit what you have done. The truth will heal the land.' Rwandan Christians offer the world this awareness of what the cross can do in healing pain and restoring an ability to forgive."

Each Gacaca will have the ability to determine guilt and consequences-whether the accused should face additional prison time or pay restitution. But the emphasis will remain on truth-telling and reconciliation. Confession will have a prominent place in the process and will influence the severity of any penalty.

Gacaca is not foolproof. Ibuka, an advocacy organization of survivors, reported that four witnesses who were prepared to testify in Gacaca courts were murdered during the second half of 2003. "These killings are well-planned and target one section of people with the intention of keeping their lips shut," the organization said. Also, police have rearrested 787 (of 25,000) parolees who came under new accusations after release.

Experts in restorative justice recognize its limitations. A victim who has been reconciled to his neighbor may still be homeless and unemployed. Howard Zehr, an American authority on restorative justice at Eastern Mennonite University, told me during a stateside interview that Gacaca was not designed to deal with genocide. He said, "Victim and offender are so intermixed in these communities, there's been concern about abuses in its practice."

That being said, there seems to be no more hopeful prospect for national healing than supplementing the justice system with both Gacaca and Christian leaders committed to full reconciliation. In my travels, I met three individuals in particular who are working toward restorative justice in Rwanda in impressive ways.

### **A Warden's Ministry**

Inside the Kigali prison complex, Warden Muligo Faustin invited me into his sparsely furnished office. Large windows overlook the prison courtyard. On a worn chalkboard behind his desk, his staff keeps the daily count of prisoners.

Faustin, a lean man with penetrating eyes, has had an unusual career. Before working as a prison warden, he was a social worker for World Vision Rwanda. He found his outreach did not fully address the injustice that widows and orphans suffered during the genocide.

In mid-1994, there was an urgent need for prison administrators. He took an exam and was hired to run a prison in a smaller city. "I was there to change the world," he said. In time, Faustin took on the warden's job in Kigali, one of the nation's largest prisons.

"Before I was hearing widows, orphans, and survivors," Faustin said. "Now I work directly with the genocidaires. It's a burden on my heart. The genocidaire is a human. The survivor is a human. I have to hear them as a human."

Prisons are deeply involved in the Gacaca process. Prison counselors, including pastors, prepare the accused as well as family members for their Gacaca hearing. Faustin said he personally supervises that process. "I am a guide for the prisoners. The prosecutor and I have to agree to release.

"The prisoners think they are seen on the outside as something very terrible. When a genocidaire starts to tell the truth of what they have done, families react very strongly: 'No! That's not you. Don't talk about that. Hide it.'

"But the genocidaire should say, 'I have to talk about it.' Reconciliation has to start inside the prison." He said chaplains, local pastors, and others are going "story by story" through the prison population. So far more than 1,500 have confessed to crimes.

A couple of days after my initial visit, I returned to the prison on Saturday when families visit. The setting was remarkably festive. Hundreds of genocidaires' family members stood silently across from their fathers, husbands, uncles, sons, or brothers as an inmate gospel band and red-robed prison choir performed with an electric guitar, hooked up to a battery-powered amp.

Two English-speaking inmates, named John and Innocent, agreed to talk. They were clean-cut and cheerful. Shouting over the raucous 23-voice praise choir, Innocent said, "I'm not afraid to face [Gacaca]. It is a justice.

"I want to return with my family, not only for myself but also for the others so we can be together. I'm eager to get my life back together." He is married and his wife is in school.

John (wearing a red baseball cap with the words GOD IS GREAT) told me, "Pastors have come to do programs and explain about Gacaca. We are willing to be taught, but maybe it's already too late." During the genocide, "Everyone killed someone, and it was not a crime." Ordinary Hutus had a fateful choice: Kill or be killed.

Rwanda will have about 9,000 Gacaca courts when the system is functioning fully. "The point is to restore relationship, even though there will be punishment," said Anastare Balinda, administrative counselor for the Gacaca courts, during an interview at the Department of Justice. "Genocide survivors are happy about Gacaca. It will be their opportunity to find out how their relatives died, who took what, and what happened."

### ***From Holocaust to Genocide***

If any person in Rwanda merits being in a category of one, it is an American missionary, Sonja Hoekstra-Foss. She has served in central Africa for 17 years and many consider her to be reconciliation personified. Her original job description never encompassed what has turned out to be Sonja's important role: Through her example, helping Rwandan survivors learn to talk about hate, terror, survival, and forgiveness. She wears a Star of David and a Cross around her neck.

Sonja is a Dutch Jew. During the Holocaust, Sonja's parents (the Khans) placed her into hiding with the Hoekstras, a Dutch Reformed family in Eindhoven, Netherlands. In order to adopt her, the Hoekstras pledged to raise her as a Jew. She went to synagogue and Hebrew school, and celebrated Jewish holy days.

Most Khan family members died in the Holocaust. As a young adult, she immigrated to America and in time came to faith in Christ after reading the Gospel of Matthew. But her past always haunted her, driving her to answer the questions Who am I? and Why did I survive?

At a Boston church in the 1980s, Sonja attended a conference on healing of memories. There she encountered a German woman, who as a child was drawn into the Nazi culture of the 1940s. During a small-group breakout, Sonja spoke to the woman symbolically: "In the name of Jesus Christ, I forgive you for killing my parents!" The two embraced and wept. Afterward, Sonja was invited on short-term missions trips to share her gripping story of healing.

Some years later, Sonja accepted a full-time appointment to work alongside Bishop Kolini in Zaire (Congo). In 1994, she served as treasurer for SOS Rwandan Orphans, one of the few African-based efforts to provide direct aid to the survivors of the genocide. Traveling into Rwanda with \$11,000 cash on her person in a van containing 1,000 kilos of clothing, medicine, and food, Sonja and a small ministry team crossed the border.

On their arrival, they searched Kigali for a struggling orphanage. Their cash and material goods ended up on the doorstep of Damas Gisimba, a kind of African Oscar Schindler (the German industrialist who saved 1,200 Jews from annihilation). Gisimba, a child of a Hutu-Tutsi marriage, personally intervened during the 1994 slaughter to save 400 Rwandans at the orphanage his father founded in 1980.

Later in 1996, Sonja and other missionaries helped Tutsi and other Christians escape certain death as war spread through central Africa. At a meeting of Rwandan church leaders, she shared her story of Holocaust survival. An overjoyed Rwandan pastor came up to her and said, "I am happy to hear that God has called you to come here. Your story is our story, and you belong here."

Since relocating to Rwanda, Sonja has built relationships with many survivors, listening to their hopes and sorrows. "I feel Rwandan and this is home," she said.

A few years ago, Sonja was walking home when a young Rwandan woman stopped her in the street. "Do you remember me?" the woman asked.

"Your face is familiar, but I just can't place you right now."

"I want to give you this," the woman said, handing Sonja the equivalent of \$400 in Rwandan francs, about four months' wages. "Thank you for enabling me to flee."

Sonja wanted to give the money back but realized that would have been culturally offensive. She felt obliged to take it, and she used it all for ministry. "It was incredible," she said. "If you do God's work, he will provide everything."

In talking with survivors, Sonja says she feeds them insights from her own experience: God's plan is to make you prosper, not harm you. We forgive, but we cannot forget. There is level ground at the foot of the Cross.

Sonja took me to visit Theodore, a survivor from Gikongoro who lost many family members, including his father, in 1994.

"Reconciliation is possible," he said. "It's a process, not a game to play at." Our interview took place in his tiny, two-room apartment, about the size of a king-sized bed. As he spoke, he carefully removed his trousers to show me the deep scars on his legs from gunfire and machete assaults.

"We have to accept reality step by step. They have to understand the bad they did," he said in voice heavy with grief. "If there had been no genocide, I would have finished my university degree and had a job. I could have had my own family. A wife and children! I pray a lot to forgive."

### ***Courage in a Post-Genocide Church***

Rwandans have a famous saying: "God travels around the world during the day, but returns to Rwanda at night." Archbishop Kolini told me Rwandan Christians must reinterpret such cultural expressions as God's invitation to deeper relationship. He said Rwandans, after the genocide, understand better that "their refuge is in God, not in religion."

"God is with them and telling them: I'm still here. I'm not dead. I haven't abandoned you."

Rwanda by 1994 was 90 percent Christian and had a rich history of renewal, dating from the famous East Africa Revival in 1929. "They were babies like the church in Corinth," Kolini said. "That's how I look at the church of Rwanda before genocide."

Since the genocide, the religious demographics have been changing, with Protestants surging nearly 20 percent in half a decade. Though Catholics have declined (by 7.6%), they still make up 49.6 percent of the population. Protestants now account for

43.9 percent (and Muslims, 4.6 percent). But Christian tradition and ethnic background have not been as crucial as simple acts of courage.

A Tutsi, Kolini took office as archbishop in 1998, and soon after, he experienced a defining moment over a simple, midday meal. He had traveled to Rwanda's southeastern border for a confirmation service. Thousands of Hutu refugees were encamped in the vicinity.

It was a dangerous situation to step into, with many genocidaires hiding in the camp. But "as the archbishop, I had to go," Kolini said.

After the service, they all gathered to eat. One Rwandan came up to Kolini, urgently asking him, "Aren't you afraid of being poisoned? Are you going to eat?"

Shocked, Kolini thought to himself: If I don't eat, then I have spoiled my gospel. He carefully replied, "I have to sit down. These are my friends in the Lord and the gospel."

Breaking bread, Kolini said, has become one tangible step toward reconciliation. During my interview, Kolini asked, "Did Jesus ask his Father whether it was safe to come into the world? He had to obey. If the Lord is calling you, nobody should ask you a question about coming to Rwanda, even if there is no security."

I asked him where he thought God was during the genocide.

"It's not an easy question. To me, God was there: Invisible, but visible. Not to people who organized and executed the genocide, but visible to the victims. It was not God's will for genocide. At the same time, he was welcoming his people home. God is mysterious. I grow when God reveals his mystery."

Kolini believes that not just the Hutu militants are on the hook for what happened during the genocide. One analyst has said that other than the government, churches bear the heaviest responsibility for not stopping the genocide. Three Rwandan Christian leaders await a U.N. trial in Tanzania. A leading Adventist pastor and his son were convicted. (A Catholic bishop has been acquitted and an indicted Anglican bishop died in U.N. custody.)

"When Rwandans were crying out for help, the world was silent. Quiet!" Kolini said in anguish. At the same time, he wants to point out, "We forgive the genocidaire. We also forgive the U.N. and the rest of the world."

Among Rwandans, then, honest storytelling has become a strong catalyst for reconciliation and remembrance. Missionary Guillebaud shared with me Deborah Niyakabirika's story, chronicled in a World Vision Australia video. Her son was murdered, in an isolated act of ethnic vengeance, three years after the genocide.

Months after the killing, a young man visited Deborah. "I killed your son," he said. "Take me to the authorities and let them deal with me as they will. I have not slept since I shot him. Every time I lie down I see you praying, and I know you are praying for me."

Deborah answered, "You are no longer an animal but a man taking responsibility for your actions. I do not want to add death to death."

Then Deborah did the extraordinary. "But I want you to restore justice by replacing the son you killed," she continued. "I am asking you to become my son. When you visit me, I will care for you."

Today, that young man is an adopted member of her household.

# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## Unit 7

### Outreach to the “Other”



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# Unit 7 – Outreach to the “Other”

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### Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Write a definition of what it will mean for you to love your enemies
- Interact with the tension between forgiven enemies and pursuing justice against oppression

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### ***Introduction & Author’s Note***

Being involved in reaching across cultures will take various degrees of work – but it will require work. This work is something we’ll refer to in the Final Unit as “Intentionality.” The magnitude and risk of reaching out to the “Other” will vary for every individual. When I was a child, my father invited an African American family from our church to our home for dinner. Our neighbors in our Irish-American neighborhood came out of their houses and sent threatening glances our way. After my father’s guests had departed, one neighbor came, knocked at our door, and began interrogating my father as to why he was inviting “those kind of people” into our neighborhood. For my father, being intentional towards someone who was different carried with it some social consequences.

For a black man who serves as a pastor in a South African township, intentionality was more costly. He had been struck by a car driven by a white man; the accident broke his leg so severely that eventually it was amputated. The white man explained that he had chosen to run the black man over because to swerve in the other direction would have damaged his car!. The white man never apologized or asked forgiveness.

After becoming a follower of Jesus, the black man decided that he needed to forgive this white man who had run him over. He went to the white area of the city, knocked on the man’s door, explained who he was, and told the white man that because of Jesus, he forgave him. The white man called the police and had the black man escorted away.

For this black man, the consequences of intentionality were much more severe. It cost him emotionally; it endangered his own safety; it even caused him to incur great criticism from his black friends who thought he was going too far.

But little will be done without intentionality. The rifts, bitterness, and hurts that exist between people are so deep that someone needs to take the first step towards reconciliation. No matter how different we are from one another, we need to reach out across the barriers that exist, like the black man from South Africa, “because of Jesus.”

### ***At the Half-Way Point***

We are now at the half-way point in the course. There will be more biblical examination and personal reflection ahead, but this Unit is dedicated to getting you started with greater personal interaction and implementation in your life, your relationships, and your ministries. Jesus said, if you have my words, blessed are those who obey them. In other words, putting the truths of this course into practice is far more important than just filling in answers or even passing the course!

**Think about it****Answer Box #1**

Let's start by reading *John*, the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. Read this passage and reflect below:

- 1) In what ways was this woman “other” to Jesus?
- 2) What were the costs to Jesus for him to reach out to her?
- 3) What were the costs to the woman to respond to Jesus?
- 4) How does this story affect the way that you see other people around you who are outside of your culture, ethnicity, or accepted “group”?

**bible study****Introduction to the assignment**

Writing about this woman's encounter with Jesus, New Testament scholar Judy Gundry Volf, observes that in Jesus, the Samaritan woman found “a Jew who did not impose on her the Jewish stereotype of a Samaritan... and ... a man who did not impose on her the stereotype of a woman. The living water overflows the boundaries dividing the figures in this story and envelops them in a new inclusive communion.”<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to relating and reaching out to those who are “other” to us, Gundry-Volf concludes that God's mercy triumphs over “the prejudice-based distance between nations and cultures.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Judy Gundry-Volf, “Spirit, Mercy, and the Other,” *Theology Today* 51 (January 1995), p. 510.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 522.

**Answer Box # 2**

*Write out your response to this question: What will it take for me to love my enemies? Respond especially in five areas:*

- 1) Whom am I thinking of when I think of the word “enemies”?*
- 2) What attitude change will I need to have in order to love my enemies?*
- 3) What action steps will I need to take to love my enemies?*
- 4) What pressure will I receive from others if I love my enemies?*
- 5) What supernatural help will I need from God in order to love my enemies?*

**Mid-Course Assignment**

**Mid-Course Assignment**

*Read the following seven case studies from the document “Reconciliation as the Mission of God” As you read these case studies, make notes in the wide margin on insights, questions, things you want to remember, etc. Then, after all of these cases and considering the lessons learned, write down three concrete action steps that you can take in the next three weeks to work towards the goal of reconciliation between yourself and someone you might consider “Other.”*



## Readings



- *Case Study #1: Burundi*
- *Case Study #2: Bethlehem*
- *Case Study #3: Israeli and Palestinian Women*
- *Case Study #4: The Church and the Treatment of Aboriginal Peoples in Australia*
- *Case Study #5: Conflict in the Congo*
- *Case Study #6: Building a Multi-Ethnic Campus in the USA*
- *Case Study #7: Kosovo and Christian Witness*

### **Case Study #1: Christian Witness and Reconciliation Initiatives in Burundi**

Prepared by Andre Butoyi

#### ***Burundi Conflict Context***

Burundi is a small, mountainous, landlocked country in the Great Lakes Region of East Central Africa. The country has one of the highest density populations in Africa (over 6.5 million). For more than 40 years of independence, Burundi has been known to the world for its lack of peace. High intensity inter-ethnic killings have occurred in 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988 and 1993-2003. The political-ethnic conflict that exploded in 1993 was nothing but a manifestation of existing tensions between two dominant ethnic groups (the Hutu and the Tutsi). For historical reasons, the Tutsi (14% of the population) have been ruling the country for many years, before and during the colonial times and through the post-independence period. The struggles of the Hutus (85% population) to gain control and of the Tutsis to keep it have always lead to fierce fighting and mass ethnic killings. For the Tutsis, to remain in control of the power machinery is their sense of security. Dominating the military system (where they have the majority) has been the key stumbling block for long time. In the midst of the fierce rivalry between Hutus and Tutsis, the third largest ethnic minority group, the Batwa (1%), has been drastically marginalized in all areas.

Estimates indicate that some 250,000-300,000 people were killed during the inter-ethnic fighting that occurred between 1993-2003. Nearly 1 million people went to either internally displaced people camps (mainly Tutsi) or into exile (essentially Hutus). Political peace agreements and many cease-fires signed between various Tutsis and Hutus parties/armed factions are currently being implemented. But the people of Burundi live with the consequences of their history and are kept under persistent fear.

There have been many attempts to describe the roots causes of Burundi conflict. Most of them touch on historical facts, behavioural attitudes, systems and structures design<sup>3</sup> (as dividers). Nevertheless Burundians share many things in common (Connectors).

**DIVIDERS: Major factors of conflict**

1. Manipulated/distorted/marred history leading to frustrations, distrust and fear
2. Impunity (Corruption, injustice, crimes)
3. Unequal access to resources (exclusion)
4. Bad governance (Institutions, Structures, Systems and Dynamics)
5. Struggle for access to and control of power
6. Regional and international interferences in the conflict

**CONNECTORS: Major factors of peace:**

1. Traditional values (humanity, cooperation, mutual help)
2. Language, easy communication
3. Prayer, worship, religion
4. Freedom of associations, increasing civil society initiatives
5. “Heroes” who protected other ethnic members from death
6. People wishing for the end of war

Within this setting, churches and their leadership have shined by their absence in the area of influencing positively the trend of events.<sup>4</sup> Rather, witness to Jesus Christ has been tarnished by:

- Churches/Christian organizations’ involvement in divisions, at times being used as arms for political superstructure propaganda rather than neutral peace steering entities.
- Lack of credibility within national church leadership, damaged by strikes, rivalry, competition, rampant promotion of self-interests.
- Lack of sound biblical teachings on Christian social/political involvement and responsibility, and intra/interdenominational syncretism.
- The so-called and hypocritical “separation from the world,” combined with the paradox of church leaders taking church matters “*before the ungodly for judgment rather than before the saints*” (1Corinthians 6:1)

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<sup>3</sup> The ranking above seemed to gather consensus in a recent (July 5-8 2004) forum of NGO’s and international funding agencies that were analyzing Burundi conflict and strategizing on peace building scenarios. Details on each point exist.

<sup>4</sup> During further discussions in the peace forum above mentioned, religion and churches as a factor has been relocated somewhere between Dividers and Connectors as something having high potential for shifting from one side to another.

All over the country, great expectations are still for the future; as people struggle to talk honestly about the past. The hearts of the people of Burundi remain burdened and wounds have not been healed. Instead, the tendency is to forget the wounds in a kind of “*reconciliation as hasty peace.*”<sup>5</sup>

### ***World Vision Burundi Peace and Reconciliation Initiative***

Since 1995, World Vision Burundi has developed major areas of engagement including:

- a. Food security
- b. Establishment of grain banks
- c. Health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS work
- d. Support of education,
- e. Housing
- f. School feeding and emergency response
- g. Child soldier demobilization
- h. Capacity building, etc.

The most cross-cutting program has been the Peace Building initiative, designed to promote healing, reconciliation and Christian witness. This program was rooted in World Vision Burundi’s vision statement: “*To see Burundians transformed and reconciled with God, with themselves, with other people around them, and with the environment.*”

Since 2002, a World Vision US-funded peace and reconciliation project was especially built in collaboration with church leaders in the capital city Bujumbura. The project’s aim was “*To effect a radical heart-felt change in the lives of Burundi’s citizens - at the national church & secular leadership levels and at the grassroots level that will begin to move the country towards peace.*” Two of the three stated objectives were:

- To decrease the fear and distrust among at least 40 respected leaders (20 from Hutu, 20 from Tutsi ethnic group) on a national level, based on biblical teaching and the gospel message of grace and forgiveness.
- To bring together all interfaith leaders to design a strategy to promote a unified involvement in peace and reconciliation activities in the country.

Activities were defined as follows:

- a. Identification of key influential church leaders and other emerging influential leaders.
- b. Select an internationally-recognized inter-faith leader to lead seminars.
- c. Conduct at least three peace and reconciliation retreats with the targeted participants.
- d. In collaboration with church leaders, undertake retreats for political leaders, business people, and celebrity groups from different ethnic groups to promote reconciliation.

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<sup>5</sup> “By forgetting the suffering, the victim is forgotten and the causes of suffering are never uncovered and confronted ... Suffering is likely to continue; the wheel of violence keeps turning...” Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, Orbis Books & Boston Theological Institute, Feb. 1996.

- e. Facilitate and help interfaith church leaders to prepare and implement a shared strategy addressing their role in peace and reconciliation.
- f. Establish on-going monthly support meetings for participants to continue to promote reconciliation and implement their strategy.
- g. Establish a design tool for monitoring and evaluating effect of the strategy within the interfaith community.

***Outcomes from the Initiative: Hope Arose from Ashes during First Meetings in late 2002***

Even though some leaders were checking on who had been invited before confirming attendance, the first conference gathered 65 prominent church leaders representing 44 denominations and Christian organizations. It was facilitated by Antoine Rutayisire, director of African Evangelistic Enterprise, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide and a prominent figure in the area of reconciliation in the region, as well as the Vice-President for the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in Rwanda. The conference aimed to discuss *“The role of the church and Christian leadership in a peace seeking process within a conflict context.”* The conference sessions addressed issues including the *Kind of Leader, the Kind of Church, the Kind of Message and the Kind of Project* that can be expected from Christians in a conflict setting. One of the conclusions was that the church needs to have a *prophetic, pastoral and advocacy role before, during and after conflict.*

The 65 leaders ended up by (a) forming a committee of 6 members representing Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic church, as well as para-church organizations, to do a follow-up plan and (b) deciding to have a further listening conference, without a foreign facilitator, to *“to dialogue, listen to each other, reconcile, repent, pray and intercede, so that leaders have same mind and spirit and support the temporary committee working on the draft of Joint Plan of Action.”* This time, moderators were chosen from among the leaders committee and facilitators from among the remaining leaders (who had a consensual credibility). Thus, 44 highly respected church representatives came back for that second conference.

The conferees began by reflecting on Philippians 2:1-4: *“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of the love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

Rev. David Niyonzima, Friends Church Leader, led a reflection during the second discussion based on Matthew 18:19: *“Again I say to you if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.”* After the reflection, he led the group in the following lesson:

***Obstacles to Healing, Peace and Reconciliation: Application to the Context and to the Church of Burundi***

1. *Ignorance, wrong information, lack of understanding that the peace of my neighbour is my peace.*

*Example:* The power of rumours in the Burundi culture is overwhelming! Oh, how people believe them! And how quickly they act accordingly!

2. *Looking for selfish interests and personal gains rather than community welfare, while at the same time affirming the pursuit of peace. Example:* The speeches that show anger on what one lost and the jealousy of what the other



one has in the political arena, even church leadership. What are the interests one should pursue in peace building rather than peace itself?

3. *Misunderstanding of one’s role in the maintenance of peace. Example:* Some political leaders do not understand the contribution that the population can bring to peace building. They think that all decisions can be made independently as long as one is in control. Does everyone need to contribute militarily in peace building?

4. *The biased concept of justice. Example:* The understanding that justice is a tool/weapon to get your way or to use for the welfare of your own people. Do you study justice to get hold of power and be able to control? Why do people study law? To judge or to reinforce justice?

5. *Confusion among Christians on the concept of peace and war in the Bible. Example:* Using the Bible to justify wars. Not enough teaching is given on the subject of non-violence. Is there enough understanding of the biblical principles among Christians in Burundi so that one makes a decision to enrol or not to enrol in the army/rebels? Is going to the army/rebels getting a job or is it patriotism?

6. *Confusion between what is political and what is Christian. Example:* A concept that politics have no place in the Christian life, thus Christians being indifferent to political injustice. Should Christians say nothing to a divisive political speech?

7. *A reluctance to change mentality on changing situations Example:* Power sharing: the advantages and disadvantages. What do people think of the army/rebels? Protectors or destroyers? It depends on who is judging.

8. *Lack of social aspect in the gospel presentation (gospel interpretation, domestication and preaching) Example:* Preaching has emphasized more the vertical relationship (love God) and less on the horizontal aspect (love your neighbour). How do we understand penetration into the world and being salt to people? Can light be the light when it is not brought into the darkness?

At the conference closing ceremony, one bishop stood and said, “This is just the beginning of healing and revival. God is going to do tremendous thing in the church of Burund and in the country. From what we have done, Christians in our churches will soon see the fruit.”

### **Further Outcomes**

“A nation is more powerful when it kneels before God than when it transforms all its resources into arms or guns. By the Honourable Reverend Joseph Bararu

The six month pilot project has been extended for almost 2 years now. Over 200 church leaders, gathering in a series of seminars, designed a plan of action that identified five areas of intervention: (a) Collaboration and networking for church leadership training, (b) Church in an advocacy role: reaching politicians and business leaders by the message of reconciliation and outreach for marginalized people/groups, (c) Use of media for the church’s mission fulfilment, (d) Churches addressing peace-building, poverty alleviation & development and HIV/AIDS mitigation, and (e) Churches and Christian agencies partnering for more impact in the community.

- Nearly 40 politicians committed to regular dialogue and prayer in a kind of fellowship within Burundi Parliament. Their network actually seeks to influence policy-making for peace restoration starting within the Parliament. Their regular meetings have built on Amos 3:3 *‘Can two walk together, except they be agreed?’* and on Matthew 5:13-14.
- Through youth-by/to-youth outreach approach (drama, conferences, peace education etc), over 2,000 teenagers have been exposed to the message of reconciliation and forgiveness. Transformed by God power, youth from different ethnic sides are eager to share their stories with other youth, especially the youth involved in politics.
- Over 500 prominent women leaders in coalitions went through conference/seminars on “The ‘Role of Women in Peace Building” or in intercession conferences accompanied by self-organized demonstrations.
- *“We can build political and social strategies to come out of crisis, but we will still need to pray for the nation to come back to God the Creator.”* Honourable Laurent Kagimbi, also chairman of the Catholic Church Committed Laymen Groups, Burundi
- Around 150 intercessors from churches and Christian agencies (and from different ethnic sides) met twice in 2004 to build up the Burundi Intercessors Network and prayer strategy. Two international facilitators helped on this by running seminars of conflict and spiritual mapping, nationwide intercession movement enhancement, etc.

### ***Obstacles and Hindrances for Reconciliation***

- The weight of past wounds and conflicting relationships between leaders of traditionally larger denominations on one side and leaders of newly-formed churches<sup>6</sup> on the other. Later on, enthusiasm of some leaders from the so called “big denominations” went down because of that.
- Even if there is no open opposition between Protestants and Catholics, a wall of mistrust between them has been a kind of “shadow” to the initiative.
- New forms of competition appeared as churches or local Christian organizations competed by breaking alliances and forming new ones to attract resources for their own reconciliation initiatives. (Reconciliation programs were seen as opportunity to promote “own” ministries/churches.)
- Lack of consistency and failure to view the work of reconciliation not as a strategy but more as a spirituality, an attitude of recognizing God *“that filleth all in all”* (Ephesians 1:23).
- Lack of theological foundation and teaching to back all efforts and lack of inclusive vision for national healing, reconciliation outreach for the kingdom of God.
- Some church and Christian leaders still stigmatizing their fellow brothers and sisters who are politically engaged.

### ***Analysis of Success and Failure***

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<sup>6</sup> Some leaders of newly-formed churches have withdrawn from the larger denominational churches, and the separation has not always been peaceful.

The project seems to have success in the area of applying the ministry of reconciliation to explore new facets of witnessing for the Kingdom of God:

- Reconciliation ministry by/among/with women.
- Reconciliation as channel to witnessing in political arena or the highly-educated social level.
- The “*enough is enough*” generation: willingness among youth to see transformation and to reach other youth.
- Reconciliation viewed as component of healing, prayer, repentance and intercession in individual and corporate social therapy.

All these areas attract people and Christians that are/have been somehow “victims” of the existing order, structures and/or systems including the religious ones. On the other hand, groups or individuals representing the “status quo establishments” always showed hesitations to engage on the reconciliation road.

Probably this indicates that, within a destructive conflict context, it is easier to take/lead the less comfortable people (probably victims) on the *road of healing and reconciliation* than ‘pushing’ the well-established groups/individuals (let us assume they are not profiting from the context) even one step down the same road.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Lessons/Practices that Worked***

- *Delegating and keeping people accountable*: World Vision (WV) Burundi kept a small number of personnel to nurture the organization’s relationships with various groups and committees involved. Various groups took the lead in planning and implementing. This was difficult at the beginning, but rewarding later on.
- *Don’t cheat God*. We are agents of reconciliation in the hands of God *the reconciler*: At the beginning, WV Burundi laboured to convince leaders that many other people or organizations are able to bring church leaders together and thus welcomed a shared responsibility/role; the reconciler is not institutions with/without resources but God who works to “*reconcile both unto (Him) in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity...*” (Ephesians 2:16).
- Promotion of maximum coalitions/consensus at all stages.
- No distribution of resources (especially financial) to individuals or individual organizations. This was difficult at the beginning but slowly people appreciated and even abandoned the habit of expecting per diem for their participation in events.
- Rather, churches and organizations started contributing in various ways to the costs of catering.
- “For those who are reconciled, reconciliation becomes a calling.
- They ... serve in a prophetic way for the whole society.”<sup>8</sup>

Some years ago, I was leading a certain youth Christian fellowship. One of the Christian brothers had a demonic attack. When he became demon-possessed, the situation quickly turned helpless and unbearable both for him and the rest of brethren amidst the community of unbelievers where we were living. One Christian sister and I decided to undertake a full day retreat to

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<sup>7</sup> ‘How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!’ Mark 10:23

<sup>8</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, Reconciliation. Orbis Books & Boston Theological Institute, Feb. 1996.

fast and pray for him. We left him behind and got one pastor’s office in the city to pray. We were from different ethnic groups; I am a Hutu (Burundi) and she is a Tutsi (a Rwandan refugee at that time). She was an Anglican church member and I was (and am still) a Pentecostal church member.

We praised, worshiped the Lord, shared the word of God... until we were stopped. The Lord convinced us to repent! This was very tricky, because we prepared that day of intercession by “humbling” ourselves and “getting ready” for the Lord, but His voice insisted. Then I started telling my story prompted from the deepest of my heart: “Pray for me: every time a Hutu comes to me complaining of the ‘injustice’ they endure, I am weak to tell them the story of hope I have in Jesus. I need to be bold.” My fellow sister opened her heart: “Pray for me! Every time I hear politicians debating whether or not the Burundi Army should be reformed,<sup>9</sup> fear invades my heart thinking that the Tutsi in Burundi can be killed by Hutus as it has been in Rwanda.” After confession we alternately prayed for one another. Mark 11:24 was then brought to our minds while we were praying: “*Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*”

We believed that our friend was healed and three months later he was completely delivered. We have never forgotten the lesson! Reconciliation requires more than echoing the ‘Alleluia’ from the person sitting next to you during a Sunday service in church. It requires honestly facing each other and the realities of daily life and being open to work on bridging the gaps for the glory of God the reconciler.

This experience, combined with biblical reflections (e.g. Ephesians 2:11-16, 2 Corinthians 5: 14-20, 1Timothy 2:1-6, Acts 17:26-30) have shaped, nurtured and sustained my involvement in reconciliation programs in World Vision Burundi and elsewhere.

*Andre Butoyi is an agronomist by profession, an interdenominational preacher and intercessor by calling. He has served as Program Officer in Africa Revival Ministries, involved in evangelism and development. Andre joined World Vision Burundi in 1999 and now serves as Coordinator of Peace, Reconciliation and Christian Impact in Burundi*

## **Case Study #2: Forgiveness in Bethlehem: A Personal Experience**

Prepared by Bishara Awad, President, Bethlehem Bible College

As a child I was wounded and suffered in many ways. I did not live my childhood years. When I was nine, my father was shot and killed in the War of 1948. He was not a fighter, but like many civilians, lost his life. The war of 1948 was very devastating for me and my six brothers and sisters. We all saw our dead father and how we had to bury him in the courtyard, since there was no way to get to a church or call a clergy person. I could still hear the sounds of the fighting and the explosions all around us in the Musrara area of Jerusalem. My oldest brother was 10 years old and my youngest sister was 4 months old. One can just

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<sup>9</sup> For many years, the army of Burundi has been predominantly made of Tutsis. Now it is in the process of being reorganised to include other ethnic groups.

imagine what went through our minds as tender children. For weeks, we could not leave the house and were caught up in cross-fire. I was not aware of all the things that were happening around me, but I could not forget how terrible things were for my mother and a few of our neighbours who were stuck like us.

In April 1948, the Jordanian Legion captured Musrara area and we were relieved to know that an Arab Army finally came to help. But to our great surprise, they took us all as prisoners and they considered us as Jews. They were treating us terribly and at one point, they lined us up against the wall, children and adults, and were about to shoot us. My mother pleaded with them and tried to convince them that we were Palestinians. The Lord spared us at the last moment when a Palestinian soldier showed up and stopped what would have been a massacre.

I was only nine years old, and at that age I decided that I would help my mother, who became a widow at age 29. At midnight one night, the Jordanian Legion army told us to run for our lives. We left everything and for hours we walked and walked until we reached the Walled City of Jerusalem. We left with nothing but the clothes on our backs — some of us only in our pajamas.

In the Old City, we became refugees. We were put in a kerosene storage room that had no furniture. A Muslim family gave us blankets and some food. Life was very bad and extremely hard. I still remember the terrible smell of the kerosene and how many nights I went to sleep with an empty stomach. Mother refused to go to a refugee camp and decided to dedicate her life for us children. Later, Mother was able to rent a one-room apartment. We were certainly very poor and I cannot remember ever having a new pair of shoes. But we were happy and satisfied.

Mother had some nursing training before she got married and so she obtained a job as a hospital nurse earning \$25 a month. She worked and studied during the nights. We, the children, were put in boarding schools. My sisters were accepted in a Muslim school and a British lady accepted the boys in a home run-school. To me, this came as a real blow. First I lost my father and now I was away from my mother and family. We were allowed to visit home once a month, but otherwise we stayed at the boy's home for the next twelve years. Suffering continued, as we never had enough food and the treatment at the school was very harsh. I saw other kids getting beaten by the teachers, so I was always afraid and tried not to misbehave.

At the school I had a sponsor from the United States that I never was allowed to meet and I never got the gifts that were sent to me. Yet, at school I was able to attend church and became very active in Sunday school and later became a Sunday school teacher. When I finished high school, I was so surprised to receive a scholarship to study in the United States. I ended up in Mitchell, South Dakota, in the USA

In 1967, another war took place in my country. I was so relieved that my mother and all my siblings were all right. However, the war was another catastrophe for me personally. I found out that since I was away during the war, I lost my right to return. At that time I completed my education and was ready to return to stand by my mother who had worked very hard. I was completely taken back by this new Israeli law. So, I applied for a teaching position in the USA and the school district hired me since they badly needed science teachers. The school also applied on my behalf for me to become a permanent resident. It was the hand of the Lord that directed all of this and in 1971, I became a USA Citizen. I was finally able to go home as an American citizen, which I did. The feeling was terrible, as I knew I could only come as a visitor on a three-month visa. On this visit, I met Salwa, who later

became my wife. As my wife, Salwa applied to the Israeli Government for a family reunion and, again, the Lord gave favour and I became a resident of my own country.

We made our home in Beit Jala, where I was assigned a headmaster of the Mennonite School for Boys – an orphanage started by the Mennonite church. The school provided for boys who were orphans, poor, lost in the war and completely needy. Both Christians and Muslims were invited to come. Chapel hour was every day, but no one minded, not even the Muslims.

While at the school, the Mennonite church wanted to phase out and I was instrumental in creating a society called The Arab Charitable Society that took responsibility for the school and a new name was given to the school – Hope Secondary School.

At that school I recalled what it was like for me as a child at the Dar-Al-Awlad Orphanage. I gave the children everything I was denied when I was young living at the orphanage. I gave them all the food they could eat and plenty of love and care and I tried to feed them spiritually. Every day we would have morning devotion. These boys loved to sing and give praises to God. Mostly, I and a few other teachers gave a short devotional. I noticed that no one was really growing spiritually. This bothered me and I went to the Lord asking why.

Then in His grace and mercy He spoke to my heart and I realized that I was the reason. I saw these boys as I saw myself, full of hatred and anger. Each one of them was hurt by the wars and each one was scarred, probably for life. I was the same. I was angry and I had so much hatred for the Jews because of what happened to my family and me. At that moment I asked the Lord for forgiveness. I cried out to the Lord telling Him I wanted to be used by Him.

My desire was to see these children walk with Jesus and be transformed. That night the Lord did a miracle in my life. He changed the hatred to love; He forgave me for the hatred and put peace in my life. The next morning as I led the devotional time, everyone noticed the difference. I was not the same man. They could see the word of God becoming “living” words. They started coming to the Lord and wanting to serve Him.

It was during this time that the Lord gave me a vision for a Bible School. I shared this vision with the local church leaders and they all agreed that we needed a Bible College. One pastor gave me \$20 and said, “Bishara, you can do it...Go ahead.” With this seed money we started a Bible College with nine students in 1979. We used the boys’ school building and had evening courses. Missionaries helped us. We operated like this for two years. In these two years the Lord blessed and provided for us many partners. Groups like World Vision, Christian Aid, Open Doors and many churches and individuals wanted to partner with us.

In 1981 we were asked to rent a place near the beautiful Church of the Nativity. The Lord, who is so good, provided so much for us. In 1990 we were given three buildings to use free of charge. These buildings were the Helen Keller School for the Blind. In 1996 we were able, with the grace of God, to buy these buildings for \$1.8 million dollars. It is amazing what God can do with \$20. Any time we are faithful to God, He is faithful to us.

All of this started because of the great transformation in my life. It took a humble spirit to acknowledge the sin of hatred. God can do miracles and the Bible College is one of those miracles. This I write for the glory and honour of God who is able to use us to behold His Kingdom!

*Bishara Awad is President of Bethlehem Bible College, a fully accredited institution which serves over 100 young men and women each year. In 1999, Bishara was the recipient of the Bob Pierce Award for Christian Service, bestowed by World Vision International. He and his wife Salwa have three children.*

### **Case Study #3: Israel/Palestine, Reconciliation Between Women**

Prepared by Lisa Loden, Director, Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem

**Context:** In today’s Middle East, Israelis and Palestinians are engaged in a complex, lethal struggle that is directly affecting the entire population of the area. The conflict not only involves the conflicted factions, but in today’s global village, it has implications for much of the world.

The two sides of the conflict view it from quite different vantage points. On the Jewish side, certain elements maintain that the conflict dates from patriarchal times and is prefigured in the enmity between Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Ishmael. Others describe the source of the conflict as Islam’s view of conquest and land. Those who hold these views see a combination of theological, historical and ethnic elements as sources of today’s conflict. Others in the Jewish world describe the current conflict as yet another manifestation of anti-Semitism, while some maintain that the causes are solely political and relate primarily to issues of land and water.

On the Palestinian side there is greater consensus as to the source and causes of the current conflict. In the main, Palestinians see the situation in terms of occupation and landbased disputes. They view the conflict as recent, dating from the end of the nineteenth century as Jews in significant numbers began to immigrate to Palestine. They found an existing Arab population. Increased Jewish population and economic viability stimulated immigration to the area by Arab peoples from the neighbouring nations. With Israel’s victory in 1948 War of Independence, the conflict took on new dimensions that laid the foundation for the current conflict based on land and occupation.

There is agreement between all parties that the conflict has affected the entire population. On the Palestinian side, large numbers have been displaced, land has been confiscated, families have been separated and homes have been demolished. On the Israeli side, the threat, as well as the actuality, of random acts of terrorism has traumatized the entire population. The fact of mandatory military conscription has profoundly affected generations of Israelis. There has been much loss of life and injury on both sides. Fear has played a major destructive role in the subsequent breakdown of relationships between the two populations.

The populations are severely distanced from one another. Cultural, social, economic and political differences are all factors in this distance. Palestinian Arabs are oriented towards a more rural, traditional Middle Eastern life style, whereas today’s Israelis are heavily influenced by the Western urban experience. Language is another factor. Ethnically, however, Jews and Palestinians are closely related. Recent genetic testing has shown that Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are genetically closer to each other than either group is to any other ethnic group.

The overwhelming majority of Israelis are Jews who see their attachment to the historical land of Israel rooted in the patriarchal narratives of the Bible. Most Messianic Jews hold to this understanding. Palestinian Christians claim their spiritual

heritage from the time of the early church, but history shows that Islam swept the Middle East in the 8th century causing most Christians in the Middle East to become Muslims. Today there are viable congregations of Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews who live in the midst of the majority Muslim and Jewish populations. These groups are numerically small. In total, Arab Christians of all kinds constitute about 3% of the population of Israel/Palestine. Messianic Jews constitute approximately 0.1% of the Jewish population of Israel.

Historically, Christian mission has focused on one group to the exclusion of the other.

The effect of this singular focus has not been helpful to the parties in conflict. In the Israeli/Palestinian spiritual arena, theology has played a major role. Regarding the place of Israel, supercessionism has been the dominant theology of the Palestinian church and Liberation Theology is strong in some sectors. In the Israeli sector, most Messianic Jews identify with dispensationalism and affiliate with the Christian Zionist agenda.

In contrast to the Messianic Jewish community which is entirely evangelical, Palestinian Christians are denominationally quite diverse. Anglicans, Lutherans, Latin Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox and other traditional Eastern Orthodox denominations make up a large portion of the Palestinian Christian community. These groups tend to relate to international denominational and ecumenical bodies. In so doing they frequently adopt a liberal agenda that focuses on issues of human rights at the expense of an evangelistic mandate for all. For them, the most prominent issue is justice. Reconciliation between the communities of faith on both sides of the conflict is not a priority.

The Messianic community sees concerns for truth (meaning their own understanding of biblical teaching regarding the place of Israel) as primary. This focus often precludes any motivation for reconciliation with Palestinian Christians who interpret scriptures about Israel differently.

### **Activities**

The reconciliation activities addressed in this case study take place between Palestinian and Jewish women who are believers in Jesus. The reconciliation activities described here take place between the Palestinian evangelical community and the Messianic Jewish community.

Although both groups are minorities within their peoples, these two faith communities stand firmly within their ethnic groups and identify with their respective struggles. Organized meetings between Palestinian Christian and Messianic Jewish women began in the mid 1990s. These meetings have continued on an annual basis since that time. As an outcome of the annual conferences, during the past two years, small groups of women have been meeting several times throughout the year.

The initiative came from Musalaha, a ministry of reconciliation that was founded in 1990. Women met together to tell their stories, listen to one another, learn about each other's lives and communities, pray and worship together. These activities were chosen to enable the women to begin to get to know each other and to build bridges of understanding and trust. All of the participants, both speakers and those attending, were from within the two communities.

From the beginning of these meetings, the basis was clearly defined as meeting together “in Christ/Messiah.” The primary spiritual identity was always stressed and the commonality of faith was emphasized. Women told their stories, speaking from a personal perspective as wives, mothers and daughters each struggling to live a life of faith in the midst of conflict and tension.



Biblical passages focusing on the unity of the Body of the Messiah were highlighted as foundational for reconciliation as were the scriptural exhortations to love one another. Listening to the personal narratives of one another in the light of sharing a common faith was crucial to the encounters. Speaking from the heart rather than from an intellectual perspective was a characteristic of these gatherings. Corporate prayer for common concerns has been a significant unifying factor. Singing together in one another's languages was another important unifying element.

In the early years, women shared about their cultural traditions in the context of their life of faith. One positive aspect of the women's meetings has been the participation of only local women. In the diverse cultural/religious milieu of Israel/Palestine, this has been particularly enriching.

Musalaha has provided financial subsidies to enable these meetings to take place. Both communities struggle economically, and women would be unable to attend such overnight meetings if there were no financial aid given. The administrative staff of Musalaha handled administrative matters, but the conference/meetings were planned and organized by a committee of women on a volunteer basis. All of the participants came voluntarily.

Frequently, these meetings take place during times of active conflict between the two communities. This means that local military authorities have to be petitioned for permission to allow Palestinian women to leave their areas and travel to the other side where the meetings are held. The context of violence contributes to the urgency and importance of the meetings.

One such meeting was held on the eve of national elections in the Israeli sector and it was at this meeting that united prayer for common concerns was particularly poignant.

### ***Outcomes***

The purpose of the women's meetings was to begin a relationally-based process of reconciliation. There are both short-term and long-term outcomes of the reconciliation meetings between women.

In the short term, the feedback from women attending the meetings has been almost entirely positive. They relate that they have been personally enriched and challenged by the faith of other women living in vastly different circumstances. In the context of the meetings, stereotypes have given way to seeing one another as sisters and distance has given way to mutual embrace. Worshipping together has been described as “a taste of heaven.” Comments like “why did I wait so long to come to these meetings,” express the short term impact of these gatherings. Feedback from the women repeatedly contains a desire for more frequent gatherings.

In the longer term, as a result of these meetings, relationships have begun that have endured through times of accelerated conflict and violence. One of the outcomes is a number of ongoing relationships, first between the women themselves, then between families and in some cases between two congregations. This is evidenced by the level of contact between the two groups. There are frequent telephone contacts, particularly during times of violence, as the women call one another to encourage and support each other during times of crisis. Families visit one another and attend congregational meetings together. As an outcome of the recent smaller meetings, a monthly email prayer fellowship was formed. This functioned well for several months but has not maintained the level of continuity that was hoped for.

The witness of the united community of faith that includes Jews and Arabs has had a positive effect on those hosting the meetings. These meetings have at times been held in commercial venues and staff and other guests have expressed amazement at seeing “enemies” embracing each other. In their respective communities, the existence of loving relationships “across the lines” is challenging and is a witness to the power of Jesus to break down walls.

Some criticism has been leveled against Musalaha’s reconciliation activities among women by Palestinian Christians who are not a part of the evangelical community. The focus on common faith rather than on issues of justice and liberation is perceived as naïve and an avoidance of the “real” issues. Another criticism is that rather than empowering women to stand for justice, these activities lull them with a false sense of harmony between opposing sides in the conflict.

In the context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, it is clear that there is a strong connection between reconciliation and evangelism. The reconciliation spoken of here is within the community of faith where Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians are beginning to express that they are one in Messiah. Women seem to be initially more constitutionally suited to exploring relational issues than men. They naturally identify in solidarity with other women, regardless of other superficial differences. These women strongly connect with one another on an emotional basis. The fact of friendship across the lines powerfully witnesses to the only One who has the power to unite and reconcile such diverse people into one family.

### ***Analysis***

The context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has ongoing implications for reconciliation activities. Palestinian women have a much more difficult time getting out of their communities than do the Israeli women. In earlier years, it was legally possible for Israeli women to go into the Palestinian territories while Palestinian women have always needed to have permission from the military authorities to cross over into Israeli territory. Few Israeli women have been willing to confront the military presence and cross the border to the Palestinian territories. It is much more difficult today than when the reconciliation activities were initiated. Not all Palestinian women are willing to illegally cross over into Israeli territory.

The positive short term outcomes that were described in the previous section occurred because of a basic willingness to meet with one another on the ground of commonality rather than difference. Although differences were recognized, they were not the focus of the meetings.

The meetings were intentionally structured so as to encourage the participants to see beyond the differences of culture, ethnicity, theology and language. The clear focus was always the unifying fact of the commonality of salvation in Jesus held by both communities. The dominant party in the conflict is the Israeli presence. In the reconciliation activities, however, Arab participation has always proportionally outnumbered the Jewish participation. As the years have passed, this balance is slowly changing as more Jewish women are willing to be involved in the activities. This is in large measure due to the positive short term impact of the annual women’s meetings. Messianic Jews feels themselves a part of the dominant group and as such do not feel the same vulnerability or need to interact with the other side. In reconciliation activities, the inequality of the parties comes quickly to the fore and this threatens the self-perception of the Jewish participants.

In order to facilitate the meetings, venues had to be chosen that were both accessible and non-threatening to both sides. At times this meant that some of the Palestinian women were unable to obtain permissions to attend the meetings. As these

circumstances are beyond the control of the organizers, there is no way that such problems can be avoided. They are, however, a significant factor in reconciliation activities in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

As women meet together on the basis of faith, with the aim of building trust, this leads to deeper relationship and commitment. This has proved to be an effective method of reconciliation. Particularly communal worship and prayer for common concerns of the gospel, family and society are important elements that have proved to be valuable tools in the ongoing process of reconciliation between the two communities.

While there are similarities between reconciliation activities in many parts of the world, reconciliation in the context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is in some ways unique. In the area of women’s work, the model described in this case study can be applied in other contexts of conflict. There remains, however, one issue that is unique to this conflict and to the context of reconciliation within the larger community of faith. This is the issue of the place of Israel in the plan of God. Israel cannot be dismissed by adopting a supercessionist theology of the people of God, however well reasoned it may be. The “one new man” continues to be made up of two reconciled parties, Jews and non-Jews. Ultimately all reconciliation initiatives and activities in the Israeli/Palestinian context must somehow deal with this thorny issue.

Reconciliation is finally about family. Restoring the family of God; healing it from the effects of sin and brokenness that have damaged relationships, both human and divine, is the heart of the gospel. Relationship building within the family of God is but the first step to seeing the healing of the world’s brokenness.

*Lisa Loden is Managing Director of the Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem. She is on the advisory board for Musalaha, a ministry of reconciliation between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, and leads Musalaha's women's work. Lisa and her husband founded Beit Asaph, a Messianic congregation in Netanya, Israel. In 1999 Lisa co-edited the book The Bible and the Land: An Encounter, Messianic Jewish, Palestinian Christian and Gentile Christian Views.*

## **Case Study #4**

### **The Treatment of Australian Aborigines and the Church’s Role in Reconciliation**

Prepared by Tom Mayne, World Vision Australia Advocacy Network

#### ***The Context of Conflict: The “Discovery” of Australia, Early Christian Contact, Colonisation, Altruism and Exploitation***

What became known as Australia was the last major inhabited continent to be discovered by Europeans. Jan Carstenz in 1606 was probably the first explorer to record that Aborigines inhabited parts of the vast island continent. They had lived there for perhaps tens of thousands of years.

Aborigines fit neither the construct of Rousseau’s “noble savage” nor the Eurocentric category of “barbarian.” They retold in their dreamtime stories the work of their “sky hero” creator who fashioned them and the landscape around them. They had a

complex system of lore and culture that sustained them through millennia. What place did they have in God’s overarching providence? Where did they fit in God’s sovereignty?<sup>10</sup>

In 1770, Captain James Cook sailed up the east coast of Australia and took possession of the eastern half of the continent. He carried instructions with him from the British Admiralty that read in part, “You are with the consent of the natives to take possession of convenient situations... or if you find the country uninhabited, take possession for his majesty.”<sup>11</sup> Cook and botanist Sir Joseph Banks were almost certainly aware that the territory was inhabited, since they were familiar with the records of earlier European visitors who had commented on the Aborigines.

The first settlement in 1788 was a convict colony. The Christianity the convicts were to experience, and that which Aborigines were to observe, thus had a heavy overlay of authority and harsh discipline. Aborigines wept when they saw convicts being flogged. A military drum roll announced the first Christian service where the convicts were ordered to attend, with the warning, “No Man to be Absent On Any Account Whatever.” The sermon, based on Psalm 116, verse 12, “*What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?*” must have caused the convicts to wonder just what their benefits were. Perhaps it was the benefit of transportation, rather than the alternative, which was hanging.

Whether they were Spanish or English explorers proclaiming territories in the name of their respective Sovereigns and bringing the benefits of their enlightened civilisations to the “heathen,” there were always other motives. Running parallel to such espoused altruism was a race between the Europeans to discover and proclaim sovereignty over lands believed, according to de Quiros, to contain, “As much gold and silver as you can carry and such a quantity of pearls that you shall measure them by hatfuls.”

Added to this was the often-blurred distinction between “civilizing” and “Christianising” the natives. Early attempts by missionaries to reach Aborigines with the gospel proved to be failures because of lack of support from churches and governments. Most missionaries lived sacrificially, in poverty, not far removed from the now-dispossessed Aborigines. Most early missions in New South Wales were abandoned by the mid 1800s through curtailing of funding by the Colonial government, opposition from settlers who branded missionaries as “nigger lovers” and from pastoralists who saw the missionaries taking up valuable grazing land. The contrast between dedicated missionaries and an unsupportive, racially-biased church is nowhere better illustrated than in a 1913 Presbyterian report which contained a submission proclaiming that, “It would be foolish to argue that all men are equal. The blackfellow is inferior and must necessarily remain so, but he is by no means so inferior as to be able to rise above the level of a working animal.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> J. Harris. *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity-a story of Hope*. Albatross Books, Sutherland NSW, 1990. p.541.

<sup>11</sup> D. Carne. *Land Rights: A Christian Perspective*. Australian Council of Churches, 1980, p.69.

<sup>12</sup> J.R.B. Love. *The Aborigines: Their Present Condition As Seen in Northern South Australia, the Northern Territory, North West Australia and Western Queensland*. 1915 Report to the Presbyterian Church of Australia, quoted in H. Wearne, ed. *A Clash of Cultures*. (Uniting Church, 1980) 13.

Aboriginal numbers continued to decline because of massacres, introduced disease and frontier decadency, well into the 20th Century<sup>13</sup> Aboriginal dispossession of land, language, children, culture and identity continued up to the 1970's. While mainstream churches for the most part remained aloof, dedicated independent missionaries continued to reach out to Aborigines with the gospel. Questions of social justice, however, such as land rights and the “Stolen Generations” were not addressed.

### **Activities: From Neglect to Reconciliation**

In the 1980s, I was galvanised into the realisation that the Anglican Church, of which I was a member, had sadly neglected justice for Aboriginal people and Aboriginal ministry in particular<sup>14</sup> My wife and I had worked with the Church's Flying Medical Service in Ceduna, South Australia in the mid 1960s, where we frequently came in contact with Aboriginal people.

Yet we returned to Sydney with the same level of ignorance and prejudice that pervaded society generally. This changed dramatically in 1980 when newspapers were reporting on a Royal

Commission being conducted into the effects of Atomic Bomb tests on Australian and British servicemen carried out in the 1950s at Maralinga, South Australia. *The question screamed at us: Why, when we were in Ceduna, did no one ever mention what effects the tests may have had on the Aborigines?* For various reasons Aborigines had earlier been removed from the nearby Ooldea Mission, so Maralinga became an ideal site to accommodate the tests.<sup>15</sup>

Aborigines, it seems, were expendable when it came to testing weapons and the Church remained silent. If ever there was a time in my life when I felt God speaking, it was now. *DO SOMETHING!*

### **Educating Myself and Others**

For four years I set about educating myself by meeting with Aboriginal people and reading everything I could lay my hands on – history, especially mission history. One book that proved invaluable was *One Blood*, by the Christian scholar Dr John Harris<sup>16</sup> John had done extensive research into mission history and this stimulated me into looking further into the Sydney Anglican Church's dealing with Aboriginal people. I spent many hours in the diocesan archives where my concerns about the Church's

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<sup>13</sup> John Harris. *One Blood*. (Sutherland: Albatross Books, 1990). 58.

<sup>14</sup> The Church Missionary Society had been working in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and the Australian Board of Missions in Cape York Peninsula since the turn of the 19C, but little or nothing had been done in city and urban areas where the majority of Aborigines lived.

<sup>15</sup> Controversy surrounds the removal of the Aborigines since Ooldea was experiencing problems with its water supply and this may have been a factor in the removal decision. However, the possibility of the removed Aborigines being able to return to their (now radioactive) traditional land was not a consideration.

<sup>16</sup> John Harris. *One Blood*. (Sutherland: Albatross Books, 1990).

neglect were only reinforced. The minutes of the Church Society's<sup>17</sup> annual meetings from 1856 to 1862 made dismal reading. An 1862 extract read, “*While expressing their regret that hitherto nothing has been done towards carrying out this [mission to Aborigines] object...your committee entertains the confident hope that before the next annual meeting they will have something satisfactory to report.*”<sup>18</sup>

Another further example of how Aborigines were invisible or regarded as part of the flora and fauna is provided by reference to the Sydney Diocesan Report for 1850. Explaining why dioceses had not been established in the districts of Port Phillip (Victoria) and South Australia until 1847, the report noted that, “hitherto they were previously uninhabited.”<sup>19</sup> Having researched the history of what could only be described as neglect, and realising that our diocese alone had around 45,000 Aboriginal people within its borders with no policy on justice or ministry, it was time to move forward and try and do something.

### ***Prayer, Passion, and the Empowerment of Aboriginal Pastors***

The first thing was to work out a strategy. Together with my colleague, Rev John McIntyre, we realised we needed to bring on board those willing to pray and support a synod motion calling for radical change. That change would include a request for \$1.2 million to be set aside for a fund to appoint and train Aboriginal ministers. We faxed all senior Church officials, bishops, archdeacons and other high profile members asking them to indicate their support for the motion. When the returns came in there was a 95% favourable response. Letters were then sent out to all 750 Synod representatives showing the result of the returns and advising them of the pitiful state of Aboriginal society and Aboriginal ministry.

Most Aboriginal pastors relied on income from “work for the dole,” worked as seasonal workers picking fruit or cotton, or in an office or elsewhere in order to survive. Most Aborigines had friends or relatives in prison. Most would have been affected by child removal policies.<sup>20</sup>

Domestic violence was widespread. Alcoholism and youth suicide were major problems. With the help of World Vision, we produced a low budget 8-minute video in which five Aboriginal people — pastors, a church worker and a member of the Stolen Generation — told their stories. After years of preparation, the scene was now set to present the motion to the Synod.

### ***Outcomes***

Despite the positive response from the faxes, there was serious opposition to the proposed motion. We had arranged for a number of churches to preview the video where we explained the reason for the action being proposed. The response was anything but overwhelming! Most of the objections came from the number crunchers who said they couldn't support it on financial grounds. However, not to be discouraged, we felt compelled to press ahead.

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<sup>17</sup> The Church Society was the organization responsible for placing chaplains in schools and hospitals and generally having the financial oversight of the diocese.

<sup>18</sup> Church Society Fifth Annual Report. 1862, p.19, Diocesan Archives.

<sup>19</sup> Diocesan Annual Report for 1850, Moore College Library archives.

<sup>20</sup> “Halfcast” children could be forcibly removed (sometimes without a court order) up until the late 1960s.

When the day came for us to address the Synod, everything seemed bleak. The budget had just been debated and everyone was pleading for more money to resource their particular ministries. When the time came, we screened the video, I addressed the Synod and my colleague seconded the motion. To our amazement, there was virtually no debate. Those who previously said they would oppose it, remained silent. When it came to the vote, it was miraculous - 640 to nil in favour!

With the establishment of the \$1.2 million Trust Fund, the money was invested and with the disbursements (and help from interested churches), we have been able to appoint two fulltime Aboriginal ministers. At Tregear, western Sydney, we have, following negotiations with the diocese, acquired a church building and rectory for the minister and his family. Regular (culturally appropriate) worship services are held together with Kids Club, men’s and women’s groups, Sunday School, Bible studies and prayer times. The church also runs a group home for seriously disadvantaged children. The minister has since been ordained “deacon” and we hope to see him “priested” so that he can have a voice on Synod. The other ministry at Minto, southwestern Sydney, conducts similar holistic ministries. Children who previously were turning up hungry are now being given breakfast. In both these ministries, the gospel is presented in ways that are relevant to Aboriginal people. Sermons in mainstream churches (where few Aborigines attend anyway) can be unhelpful where the emphasis may be on some finer point of doctrine or the English Reformation!

A positive aspect of these two ministries is that they are community oriented. A problem with many independent (and financially unsupported) indigenous churches is that they tend to be isolationist. These two Anglican indigenous churches foster strong relationships with the surrounding community. The Tregear Church recently held a cross-cultural night where around 300 people (mainly non Anglo-Celtic) attended. The Minto Church in collaboration with a secular Aboriginal-run corporation has been given permission to take religious instruction in its school. Overall there are many examples of these churches being able to interact with the surrounding community.

### ***Analysis***

Why did this come about? Firstly, because we believed the actions taken were clearly in accordance with the will of God. Two scriptures became dominant in our thinking. One from Jeremiah 21:11-12 and the other from Matthew 5:23-24. One speaks of justice and the other of reconciliation. Historically, the Church with few (and some notable) exceptions, had turned its back on the injustices of the past. While some of our earliest and most beautiful cathedrals and churches were being erected, Aborigines were still being shot, poisoned, forced off their lands and reduced to pauperism. Unlike in other former British colonies, no treaty has ever been negotiated with Australia’s first nations people.

The second reason is that Aboriginal Christians were taking the lead in pursuing reconciliation. It was almost as if the mainstream Church was shamed into responding, but respond it did, because reconciliation is rooted in scripture and a strong scripturally-based argument was presented. In political terms, reconciliation had become (and is increasingly becoming) meaningless — a cliché thrown around by politicians trying to appease their consciences, so the Church had to respond. Were there negative effects? Yes, a few. Some, to use the popular jargon, thought that “it’s no use throwing money at Aborigines.” Some thought that just because societies like the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Australian Board of Mission (ABM)

were doing great things in the Northern Territory and the Cape, that all was well.<sup>21</sup> Many issues still need to be dealt with. No federal government has so far apologised to the Stolen Generations, though many churches have. While we are indeed grateful to God for what has been achieved, we must not become complacent. There is an enormous backlog of neglect to be addressed. Reconciliation comes with a price. Just as Christ paid the ultimate price on the cross, true reconciliation for us will not be cheap. It will cost us our pride, our prejudices, our racism and our indifference.

*Tom Mayne first encountered remote Aboriginal communities in the 1960's, working with the Flying Medical Service in Australia. In 1996 he was instrumental in having the Anglican Church in Sydney set aside \$1.2 million for indigenous ministry.*

## **Case Study #5**

### **Intercession and Conflict Transformation in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

Prepared by Lazare R. Sebitereko, Eben-Ezer Ministry

#### ***Contextual Analysis***

In early March 1991, two clans of the Abanyabyinshi and the Abasita from the Banyamulenge tribe, living in Milimba locality, Fizi Territory, South Kivu Province in Democratic Republic of Congo, broke into the most complicated conflict that the tribe experienced for many years.

The locality is in a remote area with no roads or telephones. The village of the Abasita called Mucimisange had about 600 people, with a Methodist church in the heart of the village, while the Abanyabyinshi village, called Imurerwangombe, had more than 1,000 people with a Swedish Pentecostal church in the village. This conflict lasted four years and it had a spiritual dimension, which was completely overlooked even though the conflict had drawn in many other clans to sympathize. The police and local administration were also involved in the conflict though their involvement varied depending on how much money each side would give to buy “its reason and justice.” Regular fighting in villages and pastures left many people wounded, one person killed and thousands of acres of crops destroyed by people from both clans using machetes and axes. Children from the Abasita clan had to drop out of school because it was in the Abanyabyinshi village. Christian fellowship was interrupted, houses were destroyed and cows in the fields also became a target.

The cause of the conflict, as perceived by the communities, was over land rights. Culturally, the Banyamulenge are semi-nomadic and would move with their cattle in search of green pastures. Many times they would move with their families and settle in mountains and open places. So, members of these two clans moved from Minembwe to Milimba, all settled in one locality and built two villages in the same area with about 3 km in between. The Abanyabyinshi arrived first in the area and this time, they made

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<sup>21</sup> Arnhem Land where the Church Missionary Society (CMS) is working has an indigenous population of about 5,000. Sydney diocese on the latest census figures has around 50,000. The Anglican Board of Mission's (ABM) work is mainly confined to remote settlements in Cape York Peninsula.



a “project”<sup>22</sup> for their cattle grazing. When the Abasita arrived, they used the same open place for grazing. The Abanyabyinshi felt unhappy and prevented their neighbours from using the pasture land. The Abasita resisted and the conflict started. However, the real unseen cause was idolatry (spiritual forces) which involved witchcraft, adultery and wealth. This was could not be seen nor be interpreted in normal ways. It needed spiritual interpretation, namely intercession.

According to the Abanyabyinshi, a local chief from the Babembe tribe who controlled the area, had attributed the concession to them. The documents were not enough according to the Abasita. The police, who were approached to settle the matter, tended to side with whomever brought a big sum of money to buy his case against the other. Then one day, the Abasita brought police to arrest their adversaries. The Abanyabyinshi resisted and used force against police. In turn the police used force and killed one person among the Abanyabyinshi clan. The situation became worse.

At the same time, some members of these clans played fanatics from a distance, which in one way or the other fuelled the conflict. In the late 1950s, the Banyamulenge converted to Christianity and every Banyamulenge village had a church. However, as the days went by, this became a mere habit and not a real commitment to Christian principles. The church structure in the villages did not help. There was also another doctrinal issue, which had affected most of the churches in the Territory of Minembwe from a prophetess called Mariam, who preached divisions and said that God was not in some churches and locations! Pastors from the Swedish Pentecostal church led by Rev. Bacoba went to Milimba and tried to solve the problem, but they only went to one village where there was their church and could not fellowship with them due to those differences, although they were members of the same church. This position of the visiting delegation upset the host and it could not help solve the crisis. The other issue is idolatry. People had forgotten Christian obligations of unity, love and prayer. They practiced idolatry in form of wealth, backsliding, adultery and witchcraft. Only when the group of intercessors from Minembwe Territory got involved was the crisis solved and peace restored in the area.

### ***Intercession as the Solution***

The conflict was serious and worrying for the whole Banyamulenge tribe. Elders from different clans, led by Musafiri Mushambaro and Protais Muzero, met in Uvira and called the warring clans to stop fighting and be helped by the tribe. They accepted, but the Abanyabyinshi were not satisfied since the case went against them. The conflict was far from a peaceful solution! Early in 1994, a group of 30 intercessors from different churches in Minembwe (80 km from Milimba), led by Pastor Tite Gatako (current member of Executive Committee of Eben-Ezer Ministry) and Rev. Mathias Sibomana (current Coordinator of the Department of Reconciliation and Evangelism in Eben-Ezer Ministry) met to pray specifically for this conflict. Church leaders, elders from different clans, local authorities and the police had done their best. The only remaining option was to explore the “prayer that changes things.” They met for three days on a mountain for prayer and fasting. This initiative had no connection with local authorities, although it had support from church leaders and tribal elders. The initiative took about three months.

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<sup>22</sup> The term is used in a local context as a concession of a group of people used temporarily with agreement of local authorities.

While praying, there came a revelation on the conflict. It revealed the spiritual dimension of the conflict between the two clans. Some elements were noted such as idolatry in form of wealth, witchcraft and adultery. The team decided to pray and plan prayers in Milimba and in the villages of Imurerangombe and Mucimisange. The journey from Minembwe to Milimba took them two days to walk. The team organized three trips to Milimba. This was not easy going.

During the first trip, they went and stayed for four days in the villages, but nothing happened. On Trip Two, nothing happened. On Trip Three, the team of 30 people went and divided themselves in three groups. One group of 12 led by Rev Gatako, camped in Imurerangombe. The second group of 12, led by Rev Sibomana, went to Mucimisange. The main message came from the book of Joshua to “sanctify yourselves.” Among these teams, there were preachers and counsellors to help people come to accept their responsibilities. The third group led by Pastor Rusomoka went to the mountain to pray. After two days, a team of 16 elders from the Abanyabyinshi came along with the group one to the Abasita village. They organized a church service and after preaching, people from both clans started confessing their sins and their responsibilities in the conflict.

This took more than *six hours*, according to Kibubuta, one of the intercessory team. The following morning, all teams, 16 elders and the whole village of Abasita (men, women and children) moved to the Abanyabyinshi village for a church service. The same exercise was repeated. The Spirit of the Lord had started moving; people in tears confessed their sins, people forgave one another and reconciled together and peace reigned!

Indeed, the teaching of the book of Joshua with the main theme of “sanctification” was a real encouragement and a challenge to the behaviour of these communities, which had left their Christian obligations. Intercession was the secret to pulling down the strongholds of the devil in the area. Intercessors were not paid for that nor were they doing it for any lucrative gain. They were on a special mission. This initiative was once experienced in Nganja location in 1960’s in a conflict between the Banyamulenge and Babembe tribes, during the civil war led by Kabila in 1964 in Eastern Congo. At that time, my father Sebitereko was one of the local church leaders who led communities in intercession as a means of conflict transformation and protection of families from hostilities. This was the period in which I was born. I also witnessed the same experience during another conflict of three clans in Itombwe not far from my home area. After everything had failed, prayers worked.

### ***Outcome of the Initiative***

When the Spirit of the Lord started moving, recalls Rev. Sibomana, men and women from the two clans confessed and forgave one another. During the conflict period, children could not go to the same schools. The primary and secondary school were in Imurerangombe, thus children from Mucimisange could not go there. The young ones had to drop out of school and others were relocated to schools 15 km away from their home. After this breakthrough, children went back to the same schools, cows grazed in same fields, church fellowship and intermarriage resumed. A spirit of revival swept over the area and beyond! The church as God’s presence in communities came alive once again. Mr. Musinga Ruhutumure, a man from the Abasita clan who was one of the main actors in the conflict, was changed and transformed completely and today is a Methodist pastor. When the clans were asked what the real problem was, one said, “It was only ignorance, because land was enough for all of us.” Another one said, “We had backslidden and the devil ruled over us.”

One Methodist pastor who supported intercession as the answer to the conflict said, “Spiritual warfare can only be revealed to those who are still spiritually awake. People of these communities were spiritually dead.” Taking this case study and many others that I am aware of, reconciliation and evangelism are two divine ministries (2Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 4: 11), but in one mission. They are the proclamation of God’s presence among us. “The unity of the team from different local churches, clans, men and women, adults and youths, was a real testimony to the conflicting parties. The team was made of prayerful people and not sympathizers in the conflict,” said Mr. Kibubuta, one of the intercessory team.

**Conclusion: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6)**

God is always pleased with sincere and broken hearts! The conflict between the Abanyabyinshi and the Abasita is among many experiences that people are living across the globe. Christians must stay awake because many times the spiritual dimension is often not taken into consideration as a major hindrance to peace and stability. As much as we can prepare good projects, if they are not supported by intercession, professionalism cannot solve a spiritual problem. When people from both clans realized their responsibilities in the mess, brokenness of their hardened spirit started and solutions came naturally. No one was forced to say or to do a particular thing. The Spirit of God convinced them of their sins (John 16:8). At this time, people did not accuse each other but everyone saw his sins. Those involved were neutral in the conflict, were patient with the people in crisis and were obedient to God’s message. They took their time and the pain of a long distance walk. Peace between the two clans ten years later is still a reality.

There are some realities which cannot go unnoticed as I analyse this conflict:

1. *Tribal leadership:* Conflict in general is part of human nature. Culturally, among the Banyamulenge, internal disagreement and conflict were always treated and solved by a council of elders composed of representatives from different clans. Each locality had its own local council. They were not supposed to make any appeal to another force. However, if not satisfied, the parties in conflict would often appeal to another council of elders in another location. With the coming of colonialism and a police force, the Banyamulenge often then started making appeals to them. This started weakening the role of tribal council — external influence in internal conflict management. As in many cases with post-independence regimes, corruption also found its way in.

2. *Religious influence:* The Banyamulenge had their religion in which they worshipped *Imana* (God), the creator through his agent *Ryangombe*. However, with the coming of Christianity, there came a proliferation of Christian denominations and doctrinal issues. Somehow, these issues became a source of tension and conflict, even though Christian values are the best source of conflict transformation. The issue is how are they presented? Church leadership among the Banyamulenge is very young and often has been in the hands of those who did not get an opportunity to acquire formal education. Lack of proper teaching has brought a sharp division in the church within the tribe. This challenge is not only among the Banyamulenge, but in many other tribes too. As a result, religion was far from solving such conflict.

3. *Biblical principles:* Proper teaching of the word of God and intercession are two fundamental elements in transforming the tribe, which can be applied to any given context. In this particular case, different initiatives were undertaken to solve the problem but did not work because the conflict is not only mechanical, but also spiritual. The intercessory team knew about the

delicacy of the problem. Their strategy was to let all parties understand their responsibilities and convince them of their weaknesses through the word of God. They took time to share the word, to pray and to listen. They were aware of the devil's scheme. For instance, during their first trip, the people in conflict did not want to welcome them in their villages.

However they were patient and kept praying and learning more about the villages' realities. After all parties were convicted, there came a spiritual breakthrough.

*Lazare Rukundwa Sebitereko has served as Executive Secretary of Eben-Ezer Ministry International since 1997. His areas of specialty include evangelism, peace and reconciliation through churches, theological education, women and children's programs, rehabilitation and humanitarian relief. He trained in theology in Nairobi and Pretoria and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pretoria. Lazare has worked as a lecturer at Institut Supérieur de Théologie et de Missiologie, a Human Rights officer for a local NGO Groupe Milima, an administrator for Scripture Union Africa, an evangelist for the Assemblies of God and as a primary school teacher. He is married, and has 7 children.*

## **Case Study #6**

### **Nyack College, USA: Building a Multi-Ethnic Campus**

Prepared by David E. Schroeder, President, Nyack College, New York

#### ***The Context of Conflict***

In the winter of 1993 the racial atmosphere on the Nyack College (New York) campus was a tinderbox, ready to explode. For nearly a decade the college had been making steady, intentional progress in diversifying its student body. Statistics showed that over 40% of the students were from ethnic groups other than Caucasian, a jump from 19% four years earlier. Most administrators and many faculty members were very supportive of the move toward multiculturalism. A higher education association with which the college was associated was already recognizing Nyack College as a model site for diversity. In fact, a Commission on Diversity was a major encourager of the efforts, and one of Nyack's faculty members was an active member on the Commission.

One of the efforts of the Commission was conducting a survey on campus of attitudes toward race and the movement toward diversity. The faculty member was eager for Nyack to participate, so at the end of a chapel service, he required the students to stay longer to fill out the form. This was not met with a great deal of appreciation and some of the responses may have been a reflection of this inconvenience. Shortly before the Board of Trustees met in February, the school newspaper was printed and distributed. *The Forum* was always eager to stir controversy, as college newspapers seem destined to do. In that issue several letters to the editor were printed that expressed very negative opinions about the diversity on campus.

Allegations were made by Caucasian students that the college was corrupting the academic integrity of its program and compromising its reputation by admitting under-prepared students.

This was a rather unveiled reference to our Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), a highly successful New York State supported entitlement program that enrolls mostly minority students who would not qualify for regular admission.

Fuelling the controversy was the polarization of the Nyack College faculty on the identity and mission of the college. The president had established a faculty governance committee, which was led by the same (African-American) faculty member who headed up HEOP and the Commission on Diversity. Some of the faculty members were convinced that the college was leaving its denominational moorings by taking on more students from other persuasions, many of them being minority students from Pentecostal churches. They wanted the power to remain in the hands of administration under the authority of the trustees. Other faculty members were advocating a greater role of governance for the faculty so they could sculpt the mission of the school toward a more urban agenda.

These tensions reached a head when during a meeting of the board of trustees at which the academic dean (who advocated greater faculty governance) urged the president (who advocated administrative governance) to allow a few students to bring invitations to the trustees to attend a banquet being sponsored by the Hispanic Heritage Association. The two students came into the board meeting, but used their opportunity to verbally attack the leaders of the school for perpetuating a racist agenda. Clearly things were out of control.

### ***Activities***

Quite obviously the board of trustees needed to intervene in this explosive situation. Fortunately, the board was united. On the one hand the board wanted the leadership to stay in the hands of the administration; on the other hand, the board was positive about the emerging mission of ministering to a broader constituency of students, including those often marginalized in the world of higher education.

Other factors outside the scope of these studies were already at work in motivating the board to replace some of the existing leaders, so when these events surfaced, the board took action to dismiss the president. Then they asked the denominational director of higher education, who sat on the board, to meet with the students to explain their action and to begin to seek ways of bringing healing and reconciliation to the campus community. They also formed a search committee for the next president, and put on that committee two faculty members, the head of the faculty governance committee and the head of the Bible department, who was a bit more “old school.”

The upshot of the search was that out of three candidates interviewed by the search committee, the board chose the Director of Higher Education to become the president. That enabled a smooth transition in activities that worked toward reconciliation. The new president took the following initiatives:

- Dismissed the academic dean for insubordination to the previous president.
- Affirmed to the college students and personnel that multiculturalism was very much at the heart of our founder’s vision and part of our early history.
- Dismantled the Commission on Diversity and set up a President’s Advisory Panel on Cultural Enrichment, a group of faculty and students who met with the president every few weeks to discuss racial and cultural attitudes and programs.

- Addressed the topics of racial harmony and cultural diversity from a biblical perspective in chapel sermons every week.
- Hired qualified minority leaders for key positions in admissions and student development.
- Met with groups of students giving them opportunity to air their grievances, including the various ethnic clubs.
- Disbanded the faculty governance committee, telling the faculty he would not interfere with their work if they would allow him to give administrative leadership to the college.
- Published for the community the data that showed that a higher percentage of HEOP students graduated and with a higher GPA than the traditional students.
- Established a multicultural celebration week.
- Advocated for transformational diversity, not just additive diversity, evidenced in chapel worship styles, food service menus, hiring practices, curriculum revision, et al. The chapel messages focused on ideas like:
  - God’s eternal family described in Revelation 7 as a people from every nation, tribe, people and language group.
  - Jesus gave the Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations.
  - Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles.
  - Paul admonished the Corinthians of diverse backgrounds to be in unity.
  - In Christ the dividing wall between ethnic groups has been destroyed.

Worship became a unifying element on the campus and each year a non-Caucasian spiritual emphasis week speaker ministered on campus, emphasizing how the deeper Christian life intersects with reconciliation. Faculty who could not adapt to the movement toward biblical multiculturalism were confronted lovingly and encouraged to change their perspective or try to find another place to teach. The president built a team of officers who were in agreement about the mission of the school embracing minority students and those often marginalized by higher education.

### ***Outcomes***

The enrolment of the college began growing rapidly, with the minority percentage staying near the 40% mark. When faculty and students realized that the new administration was not urging diversity to meet the expectations and win the accolades of others, but because it is a biblical value and a fulfillment of the school’s historical mission and identity, attitudes on campus began to change. Marketing for admissions began to send out a consistent, unified message that welcomed a multicultural student body. Denominational student enrolment climbed, but not as fast as other student enrolment. The administration announced to the trustees and denominational leaders that in keeping with our founder’s perspective, the college did not exist to serve the denomination, but existed as part of the denomination to serve others.

This set a climate for expanding the urban focus and the administration initiated a branch campus in New York City in 1995. That campus now has more than 1,000 Christian students. Enrolment growth tripled during the next decade and racial and ethnic strife is very rare. The college has made good progress in hiring minority faculty members and administrators. The trustee

board has become more diversified. The college has been recognized each of the past five years for being one of the most diverse higher educational institutions in the United States.

The success of the HEOP program inspired the administration to begin a similar program entirely funded by the college. It is called NIA, for Nyack's Introduction to Academia (also Swahili for “purpose”). This has caused the college to expand its department of academic development for remediation, especially for students who have had inadequate secondary school preparation.

Undoubtedly, some people, including alumni, who liked the old mono-cultural Nyack have stopped supporting the college and students who might have come to Nyack have opted for other schools. A few statements and letters have expressed a negative outlook when they see or hear of interracial dating of Nyack students. Some faculty members have thought the administration has tried too hard to hire minority professors. By and large, however, Nyack College has been a peaceful and unified campus. A large number of faculty from the Nyack campus have gone to the Manhattan campus to teach courses and some students have taken courses on both campuses.

Perhaps the greatest advantage the college has experienced from the ethnically diverse community is the ongoing sense of spiritual renewal. The vitality of worship in chapel is fuelled by minority students. The number of student groups that minister weekly in the city has grown from four to fourteen. A wonderful surprise has been the fact that quite often the student leaders are non-Caucasians.

In many ways, this multicultural phenomenon has been a great encouragement to many churches. Pastors that bring their young people to campus see the harmony and begin to think that they could work toward greater diversity in their congregations. People from the Village of Nyack are impressed that a conservative Christian college would have such a diverse student body. So, achieving reconciliation on the campus has had huge dividends.

### ***Analysis***

Healing the rift between groups on the college campus began by the trustees seeing that the issue was very serious and steps needed to be taken, which the administration was not willing to do. The trustees took the painful and expensive step of changing the administration to one that would take decisive action that would continue the movement toward ethnic diversification while maintaining the historic mission of the college.

The new president espoused a conservative theological position and a socially progressive agenda. The administrators he chose were on board with this mission and gradually the faculty also reflected this identity.

Gaining ethnic harmony on the Nyack campus emboldened the administration to reach into New York City to start a branch campus. Many churches of the city support Nyack by sending students to the Manhattan campus. The impact of a racially integrated, ethnically friendly college is felt throughout the greater New York area.

As good as the situation is, Nyack College is not Camelot. The administration is still dominated by Caucasian males, the curriculum has not advanced adequately toward an urban focus, the college has not been able to attract funding to support its programs and the denomination has not done a good job of placing the minority graduates in ministry. While finding minority faculty members for the city campus has not been difficult, the Nyack campus is still too Caucasian in its faculty makeup. The

college has had a few minority faculty casualties that have set the program back. In one case a competent African-American social work professor tried to split the faculty and undermine his Ghanaian-African department head. He also evidenced a complaining experience. Fortunately, after one year he chose to move on to another college where he would receive greater financial compensation.

A few faculty members are still rather elitist in their attitudes. This shows up in subtle criticism of the HEOP program and the substantial academic support department the college funds. These critical faculty members, however, are not respected as good teachers so their impact is minimal.

While overt racial strife does not seem to exist, there are still times and places where ethnic students “keep to their own.” The dining commons is an example of this. Some years there seems to be an African-American section and a Korean section of the cafeteria. Fortunately, in most sections, the groups are very diverse and the students seem to enjoy interacting during meal times.

Because the college admits only students who have made a profession of Christian faith and has a faculty which holds to the authority of Scripture, it has been possible to foster a climate of reconciliation based on biblical values as the pattern for the college community.

Because the college’s historic purpose was to prepare missionaries to be sent to the nations of the world, the administration has been able to leverage this idea to show how hypocritical it is to value ethnic people who live in other nations but not accept them in our own community.

Pursuing this multicultural agenda without the biblical and spiritual base the Nyack College community affords would be very difficult. It would be much more difficult to enact without a sympathetic, proactive board and administration. Other communities of faith would do well to use scripture as the base for enacting multicultural activity. A college may be a more fertile context than others because younger people are not set in their ways and are open to attitude adjustments if they trust those in leadership. In Nyack’s case, it was certainly beneficial to be in a part of the country where the general population is quite diverse. Regardless of one’s context, seeking first the kingdom of God means welcoming and working for reconciliation.

*David Schroeder is president of Nyack College, a Christian and Missionary Alliance, multicultural, Christian liberal arts college with an urban focus.*

## **Case Study #7**

### **Kosovo, Witness, and the Orthodox Church**

Prepared by Fr. Luke A. Veronis, Tirana, Albania

#### ***Context***

The history of the Kosovo region over the past 500 years is quite complex. One indisputable fact, however, is that hundreds of monasteries and churches, most of which are centuries old, cover the land. Their presence attests to the long history



of Christianity in the region. In the 18th century, many ethnic Albanians abandoned their Christian identity and succumbed to the great social, economic and religious pressures of the Ottoman Empire by converting to Islam. In the 19th century, a strong emphasis on ethnic identity arose in the Balkans, which led to the formation of ethnic states. The Church itself led this struggle for freedom and independence from the Ottoman Empire, often identifying herself fully with the new ethnic states.

With the divisions and formations of new states during the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Kosovo saw itself as a part of Serbia. Interestingly though, a majority of its inhabitants at that time were ethnic Albanians. In 1946, Kosovo became an autonomous province of the communist Yugoslav federation. Ethnic and religious tensions between Orthodox Serbians and the mostly Muslim Albanians were suppressed by the communist government with anti-religious and atheistic propaganda. This propaganda led to a very secular and atheistic mentality among both Serbians and Albanians.

In 1989, a rise of Serbian nationalism, led by Milosevic, led to the rejection of the autonomous status of Kosovo. Ethnic Albanian leaders declared independence from Serbia a year later. Both sides' emphases on nationalism often tried to use their differences in religion as a factor in the impending conflict. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) received significant aid from Islamic countries. Serbian militia often used the sign of the Cross as a distinction between the Serbians with Albanians.

Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing against Albanians eventually led to the March 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia, when more than 900,000 Kosovo Albanians fled into Albania and FYROM. Following the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo, revenge killings forced 180,000 Serbs and Roma to flee Kosovo, leaving only a few, heavily guarded enclaves of Serbs still in the Kosovo region.

Patriarch Pavel of the Serbian Orthodox Church issued statements at different times condemning the policies of Milosevic and ethnic cleansing, trying to preach a message of tolerance and goodwill. Many local and national leaders on both sides, however, with their atheistic mindset, tried to use their different religious cultural identities as impetuses for the conflict. The Church was often used as a puppet in the hands of atheistic political leaders.

Also, some clergy and leaders within the Church itself too readily preached a nationalistic agenda instead of the good news of forgiveness and love. One serious historical criticism of the Serbian Orthodox Church in this region over these centuries is the total absence of any effort to bring the Good News of Christ to the Muslim Albanians in their own language and within their own culture. Even though a small minority of Albanians in Kosovo are Roman Catholic, a very sizeable minority of Albanians in Albania are Orthodox Christian and despite the historical Christian identity of most Albanians, the Serbian Orthodox Church focused only on its own people and did not try to integrate this other ethnic group into their Christian family.

This ethnocentric pride, which existed in Israel in Old Testament times and even in the early Judaic Church, is a constant temptation for every Church in each generation. This bane of nationalism has tempted and overwhelmed Christianity in the Balkans. Religion and ethnicity are too often seen as one by many people in the region.

One very concrete example of this occurred recently, when I offered a presentation about the resurrection of the Orthodox Church of Albania in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina. My hosts warned me that some of the Serbians present wouldn't be able to understand Orthodox Christianity outside of their Serbian context. Sure enough, at the end of my presentation on the hundreds of Churches and the revival of Christianity in Albania, one very sincere and polite old man raised his hand and asked, "I don't understand. How can you be talking about the Orthodox Church when you haven't mentioned anything about Serbians?"

This inability to separate one’s religious identity from one’s ethnic identity is one of the most serious theological problems facing the Church in these regions.

### **Activities/History**

A unique response to this tense situation has occurred over the past five years by the Orthodox Church of Albania. This response unexpectedly began in March 1999, when 400,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees flooded into Albania. Although the vast majority of the refugees were Muslim and the Orthodox Church of Albania itself was still in the process of trying to recover from her own severe communist persecution, Archbishop Anastasios, the head of the Orthodox Church in Albania, mobilized the entire Church community to respond. While others were trying to use religion as a cause or negative factor in the conflict, he preached consistently,

*“The oil of religion should never be used to inflame the fires of hatred, but should be used to sooth and heal the wounds of the inflicted ... The radioactivity of hatred has spread throughout the world. We must combat this hatred with selfless, sacrificial love... The Church should never have enemies. We pray ‘for those who hate us and for those who love us.’ Thus we cannot have enemies. How could we? If others want to see us as enemies, it is their choice, but we do not consider others as enemies.”*

The Orthodox Church in Albania called upon her Christian friends throughout the world and responded by overseeing a \$12 million emergency relief campaign. Not only did she run the longest standing refugee camp, but she also offered aid to more than 34,000 refugees.

A memorable example of Christian love was when our women’s group offered the first clothes, food and aid to more than 300 newborn babies and their Kosovo Albanian mothers. One of the best examples of Christian witness, however, occurred when our faithful began visiting various refugee camps. Through these visits, they established bonds of friendship which enlightened both the refugees and Albanians alike. The Muslim Albanians saw Orthodox Christian believers in a new and positive light, witnessing the love of God in concrete ways. Our believers, on the other hand, overcame their initial fear of how the Kosovo Muslims would react if they discovered we were Orthodox and learned an essential lesson in the midst of suffering – that *the person in front of them is first and foremost a fellow human being in need, an icon of Christ*, not a stranger with a different religion.

When two Kosovo Albanian girls attended one of our summer youth camps that year, they were initially afraid to be surrounded by people “who made their cross like the Serbians.” However, 10 days later, one of the girls confessed in front of the entire camp, “I have never experienced such love in my life. I will never forget this camp.”

Ramadan, a Muslim man who spent two months at our refugee camp, told me during one of his return trips to Tirana after the war, “I will ever be grateful for all your Church has done for me. Really, I now understand what true Christianity is. I have hope for the future. From this experience, I believe that Serbians and Albanians can still live as neighbours and brothers with one another.”

Following the war, the Orthodox Church of Albania has tried to keep contacts and develop relationships with both Kosovo Albanians and Serbians. We understand the very unique position we hold, since the Kosovo Albanians see us as their ethnic

brothers, while the Serbians view us as their Orthodox Christian brothers. We hope that we can become a small bridge in helping each side develop a different perception of the other.

One way of trying to do this is by holding yearly summer “friendship camps” for Kosovo Albanian children in two Muslim villages. More than 700 children attended this past year. Twenty Orthodox Christians from Albania lead these camps, and worked side by side with a number of Kosovo Albanian teachers and youth leaders. This interaction is enlightening and challenging for both sides.

Simultaneously, our students visit different Serbian enclaves. For the first time in the history of some monasteries, the Serbians have heard the Albanian language in their Church services. Such efforts are attempts at breaking down century old prejudices and stereotypes from both sides.

During recent outbreaks of violence in March 2004, Archbishop Anastasios of Albania made another symbolic gesture by offering \$300,000 each to the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Kosovo Islamic Community, so that each side could rebuild a church and a mosque that had been destroyed.

The Archbishop stated, *“The burning of churches and mosques does not promote justice and peace, and certainly not progress either. On the contrary, it is a return to times and practices which led the Balkans to stagnation, divisions, and tragedies. Indeed, those who involve religion in the violence are essentially violating the spirit of religion. No matter how much one is in the right, he must respect the sanctity and the purpose of sacred places of worship. These should become centres of reconciliation and peace, and not breeding grounds for maintaining animosities. It is only with peaceful coexistence of the religious communities that genuine social progress can take place. This is the principal that we Christians and Muslims alike have adopted in Albania: to live together and to cooperate with each other in harmony. The sobriety of religious tolerance and courage of love must overcome the blind hatred that can only lead to an escalation of conflicts.”*

### **Outcomes and Analysis**

One of the most significant consequences from these initiatives has been the changed perception of the other. Despite differences in religious faith and religious culture and traditions, Kosovo Albanian Muslims in the villages where we have worked and the Orthodox of Albania who have participated in these activities, see one another as friends. Their religious differences don't turn one another into the stereotypical monster.

It must be emphasized that in all the aid we offered and with the camps we presently run in Kosovo, none of our actions were or are overtly evangelistic in nature. The emphasis is more on breaking down stereotypes, helping to see the other in new ways and creating relationships of trust and love. The evangelism comes more from the witness of how we proclaim the good news through our lives, and how we interact with the other, than to some specific words and sayings. Also, from the friendship camps in Kosovo, some participants have come to our Church camps in Albania, which are clearly Christian in nature and in word. Seeds are being planted.

As for our interactions on the Serbian side, the Serbs are often amazed at meeting Christian Albanians. After their initial shock, they have come to respect what our Church is doing and have invited members of our Church to different affairs in Kosovo.

They are beginning to understand that one can be Albanian and also Orthodox Christian, something that was inconceivable years ago.

One of the best fruits of this overall initiative is the overwhelmingly positive experience and education for our own believers. It has made very concrete the words of our Archbishop, *“The oil of religion should never be used to inflame the fires of hatred, but should be used to sooth and heal the wounds of the inflicted.”* When the Archbishop says we should have no enemies, this saying has new meaning for us as we try to offer a witness to both sides of a conflict. Our believers also have learned how difficult it is to forgive and forget the horrors of hatred and conflict. It often does not come quickly. When one has seen death and evil all around, we Christians cannot preach a simplistic message and expect forgiveness to come immediately. Hatred, ignorance, prejudice and evil are formidable barriers, which a Christian, armed with the grace of God, needs to struggle against and hope to conquer over time – God’s time, not ours.

Also, our believers are learning that evangelism is often a part of a long process of witnessing. *“Paul plants, Apollo waters, but God gives the growth.”* The planter does not always see the fruit. Or he may see fruit many years later. Our purpose and goal is to be faithful in offering an authentic witness in every aspect of our ministry and life, and leave the results up to God.

As the most famous Albanian, Mother Teresa, once stated, “God did not call me to be successful, but to be faithful.” This is what our believers are learning in this ministry of reconciliation – to faithfully offer a witness of love, and to leave the rest in God’s hands. Luke Veronis has been involved in missionary work of the Orthodox Church for the past 17 years, serving in Albania since 1994. He is the former dean of the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy in Durres, Albania, as well as the initiator of a student ministry outreach at the University of Tirana. He was involved in outreach to the hundreds of thousands of refugees who flooded Albania during the Kosovo war in 1999. He has collaborated closely with Archbishop Anastasios of Albania, one of the leading voices for peace and reconciliation in worldwide Orthodoxy.

Addition Reading: the document “Reconciliation and the Mission of God,” published by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, follows. It is not required reading, but we include it here because it provides some excellent background thinking of the work of Christians in the world in helping repair relationships between separated peoples.



### **RECONCILIATION AS THE MISSION OF GOD:**

Faithful Christian Witness in a  
World of Destructive Conflicts and Divisions

**Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 51**

**Produced by the Issue Group on this topic at the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization hosted by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization In Pattaya, Thailand, September 29 to October 5, 2004**

*“A New Vision, a New Heart, a Renewed Call”*

In encouraging the publication and study of the Occasional Papers, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization does not necessarily endorse every viewpoint expressed in these papers.

Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) No. 51

2004 Forum Issue Group No. 22

Series Editor for the 2004 Forum Occasional Papers (commencing with LOP 30):

David Claydon

This Occasional Paper was prepared by the whole Issue Group. The editor of this paper was Chris Rice. The full list of participants is at the end of this paper.

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### **The context for the production of the Lausanne Occasional Papers**

The Lausanne Movement is an international movement committed to energizing **“the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.”**

With roots going back to the historical conferences in Edinburgh (1910) and Berlin (1966), the Lausanne Movement was born out of the First International Congress on World Evangelization called by evangelist Billy Graham held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in July 1974. The landmark outcome of this Congress was the **Lausanne Covenant** supported by the 2,430 participants from 150 nations. The covenant proclaims the substance of the Christian faith as historically declared in the creeds

and adds a clear missional dimension to our faith. Many activities have emerged from the Lausanne Congress and from the second congress held in Manila in 1989. The Covenant (in a number of languages), and details about the many regional events and specialised conferences which have been undertaken in the name of Lausanne, may be examined online at [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org).

The Lausanne International Committee believed it was led by the Holy Spirit to hold another conference which would bring together Christian leaders from around the world. This time the Committee planned to have younger emerging leaders involved and sought funds to enable it to bring a significant contingent from those parts of the world where the church is rapidly growing today. It decided to call the conference a **Forum**. As a Forum its structure would allow people to come and participate if they had something to contribute to one of 31 issues (around which were formed Issue Groups). These issues were chosen through a global research programme seeking to identify the most significant issues in the world today which are of concern in our task to take the *good news* to the world.

This Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) is the report that has emerged from one of these Issue Groups. LOPs have been produced for each of the Issue Groups and information on these and other publications may be obtained online at [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org).

The theme of the Forum for World Evangelization held in 2004 was “**A new vision, a new heart, a renewed call.**” This Forum was held in Pattaya, Thailand from September 29 to October 5, 2004. 1,530 participants came from 130 countries to work in one of the 31 Issue Groups. The Affirmations at the conclusion of the Forum stated: “There has been a spirit of working together in serious dialogue and prayerful reflection. Representatives from a wide spectrum of cultures and virtually all parts of the world have come together to learn from one another and to seek new direction from the Holy Spirit for world evangelization. They committed themselves to joint action under divine guidance. The dramatic change in the political and economic landscape in recent years has raised new challenges in evangelization for the church. The polarization between east and west makes it imperative that the church seek God’s direction for the appropriate responses to the present challenges.

In the 31 Issue Groups these new realities were taken into consideration, including the HIV pandemic, terrorism, globalization, the global role of media, poverty, persecution of Christians, fragmented families, political and religious nationalism, post-modern mind set, oppression of children, urbanization, neglect of the disabled and others.

Great progress was made in these groups as they grappled for solutions to the key challenges of world evangelization. As these groups focused on making specific recommendations, larger strategic themes came to the forefront. There was affirmation that major efforts of the church must be directed toward those who have no access to the gospel. The commitment to help establish self sustaining churches within 6,000 remaining unreached people groups remains a central priority.

Secondly, the words of our Lord call us to love our neighbour as ourselves. In this we have failed greatly. We renew our commitment to reach out in love and compassion to those who are marginalised because of disabilities or who have different lifestyles and spiritual perspectives. We commit to reach out to children and young people who constitute a majority of the world’s population, many of whom are being abused, forced into slavery, armies and child labour.

A third stream of a strategic nature acknowledges that the growth of the church is now accelerating outside of the western world. Through the participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America, we recognise the dynamic nature and rapid growth of the church in the *South*. Church leaders from the *South* are increasingly providing exemplary leadership in world evangelization.

Fourthly, we acknowledge the reality that much of the world is made up of oral learners who understand best when information comes to them by means of stories. A large proportion of the world’s populations are either unable to or unwilling to absorb information through written communications. Therefore, a need exists to share the “Good News” and to disciple new Christians in story form and parables.

Fifthly, we call on the church to use media to effectively engage the culture in ways that draw non-believers toward spiritual truth and to proclaim Jesus Christ in culturally relevant ways.

Finally, we affirm the priesthood of all believers and call on the church to equip, encourage and empower women, men and youth to fulfill their calling as witnesses and colabourers in the world wide task of evangelization.

Transformation was a theme which emerged from the working groups. We acknowledge our own need to be continually transformed, to continue to open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to the challenges of God’s word and to grow in Christ together with fellow Christians in ways that result in social and economic transformation. We acknowledge that the scope of the gospel and building the Kingdom of God involves, body, mind, soul and spirit. Therefore we call for increasing integration of service to society and proclamation of the gospel. We pray for those around the world who are being persecuted for their faith and for those who live in constant fear of their lives. We uphold our brothers and sisters who are suffering. We recognize that the reality of the persecuted church needs to be increasingly on the agenda of the whole Body of Christ. At the same time, we also acknowledge the importance of loving and doing good to our enemies while we fight for the right of freedom of conscience everywhere.

We are deeply moved by the onslaught of the HIV/AIDS pandemic – the greatest human emergency in history. The Lausanne movement calls all churches everywhere to prayer and holistic response to this plague.

“9/11,” the war in Iraq, the war on terror and its reprisals compel us to state that we must not allow the gospel or the Christian faith to be captive to any one geo-political entity. We affirm that the Christian faith is above all political entities. We are concerned and mourn the death and destruction caused by all conflicts, terrorism and war. We call for Christians to pray for peace, to be proactively involved in reconciliation and avoid all attempts to turn any conflict into a religious war. Christian mission in this context lies in becoming peacemakers.

We pray for peace and reconciliation and God’s guidance in how to bring about peace through our work of evangelization. We pray for God to work in the affairs of nations to open doors of opportunity for the gospel. We call on the church to mobilize every believer to focus specific consistent prayer for the evangelization of their communities and the world.

In this Forum we have experienced the partnership of men and women working together. We call on the church around the world to work towards full partnership of men and women in the work of world evangelism by maximising the gifts of all.

We also recognize the need for greater intentionality in developing future leaders. We call on the church to find creative ways to release emerging leaders to serve effectively.” Numerous practical recommendations for local churches to consider were offered.

These will be available on the Lausanne website and in the Lausanne Occasional Papers. It is our prayer that these many case studies and action plans will be used of God to mobilise the church to share a clear and relevant message using a variety of methods to reach the most neglected or resistant groups so that everyone will have the opportunity to hear the gospel message and be able to respond to this good news in faith.

We express our gratitude to the Thai Church which has hosted us and to their welcoming presentation to the Forum. We are profoundly grateful to God for the privilege of being able to gather here from the four corners of the earth. We have developed new partnerships, made new friends and encouraged one another in our various ministries. Notwithstanding the resistance to the gospel in many places and the richness of an inherited religious and cultural tradition we here at the Forum have accepted afresh the renewed call to be obedient to the mandate of Christ. We commit ourselves to making His saving love known so that the whole world may have opportunity to accept God’s gift of salvation through Christ.”

These affirmations indicate the response of the participants to the Forum outcomes and their longing that the whole church may be motivated by the outcomes of the Forum to strengthen its determination to be obedient to God’s calling.

May the case studies and the practical suggestions in this and the other LOPs be of great help to you and your church as you seek to find new ways and a renewed call to proclaim the saving love of Jesus Christ. *David Claydon*

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**INTRODUCTION** by Chris Rice, Issue Group 22 Convenor

This Lausanne Occasional Paper on “Reconciliation” is itself the product of a hopeful journey of Christian unity, shaped by a group with deep divides in our very midst. The Paper is the outcome of intense work over 2003-2005 by 47 Christian leaders from six continents and 21 countries — practitioners, pastors, theologians, missiologists and scholars from some of the world’s most conflict-ridden places.

Our group included Protestant evangelicals, Pentecostals and denominational leaders, two Catholic priests and one Orthodox priest. We worked as Group 22, one of 31 Issue Groups who gathered at the September 2004 Forum on World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand, organized by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

Group 22’s early work together was profoundly shaped by a visit of our leadership team to Rwanda in July 2004, ten years after the genocide in which many Christian leaders and congregations were implicated. In Thailand, our entire group’s gathering was a rich experience of sharing our stories of pain and hope, building community, and debating and discerning what it means to be faithful Christian witnesses in a divided world. Our final presentation in Thailand was a public act of worship, a dramatic foot washing before the entire 2004 Forum between Rwandan Hutu and Tutsi; Israeli and Palestinian; male and female; white, black, and Asian; and Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox clergy.

We believe this sign of the church on her knees, washing feet across the boundaries of our divided world, is the vision of the kingdom desperately needed in our time. The argument of this Paper is that in a deeply broken world, faithful Christian evangelism can only be envisioned and embodied in direct relationship with the vision and practice of biblical Christian peacemaking. This must include a deep analysis of and engagement with the historical and social ground of brokenness on which

Christians find themselves bearing witness for Christ — including coming to grips with our own brokenness within that landscape. The Paper consists of three chapters: a theological and contextual analysis and vision; short vignettes from places of deep brokenness; and in-depth case studies.

### ***“Reconciliation as the Mission of God”***

After intense discussions in Thailand, this first and most important chapter of our Paper was revised and endorsed unanimously by all 47 Issue Group members in January 2005. The chapter presents a theological vision for reconciliation as God’s mission in a broken world. While pointing to signs of hope, the paper analyzes how the Christian community is being caught up in many destructive conflicts and divisions across the world today, including by promoting a defective gospel. The chapter presents a challenge for placing biblically holistic reconciliation at the heart of Christian mission in the 21st century. Its urgent call is to both personal conversion and social transformation, beginning in a critical re-examination of the very meaning of mission, discipleship, evangelism, justice, and even church in relation to God’s reconciling mission.

### ***“Roots and Realities” Vignettes***

In chapter one, we contend that “The transmission of the gospel and the ministry of the church do not run in a pure, separate historical stream, but are carried on inside of and tainted by the world’s poisoned, muddy histories. All the agents of brokenness must be discerned and confronted.” Too often we in the Christian community rush to action and “solutions” without lamenting, without truthfully coming to grips with the depth and pain of brokenness — personal, social, and spiritual — in which the church is called to bear witness to Christ.

Chapter two consists of six vignettes, each written by a different Issue Group member, describing local places of deep brokenness in the world. These stories include: Dalit “untouchables” in India; the struggle for prayer amidst violence in Sierra Leone; “sectarian” divisions in Northern Ireland; and post-apartheid church fragmentation in South Africa. Here we want to point to the importance of closely attending to the stories, histories and complex conditions of our local contexts, seeking to expose the deep and particular brokenness and pain where the church’s mission is engaged.

These vignettes should be engaged from the theological vision of chapter one. Only in the larger story of God’s action and reconciliation in Christ can we see such places not only as the deeply broken places they are, but as sites where God’s “new creation” has come to interrupt our stories of division, violence, and fragmentation, making conversion and new history possible.

### ***Case Studies of Brokenness and Hope***

Chapter three consists of seven in-depth case studies written by different members of our Issue Group including: a parachurch worker in Burundi; a Palestinian refugee in the Middle East; an advocate among Aborigines in Australia; a pastor on the spiritual dimension of peacemaking in the Congo; and reconciliation challenges in the United States and Kosovo.

These stories of people actively pursuing their vision of faithful Christian witness range from the power of forgiveness in one person’s life, to working on a broad national level, from bringing divided women together, to shaping a multi-ethnic Christian

college campus, and situations where the inability to separate one’s religious identity from one’s ethnic identity becomes one of the most serious theological problems facing the church.

The case studies are diverse, not only geographically but also because they sometimes offer differing perspectives on Christian mission and witness in the context of division and destructive conflict. We recommend these case studies for study and critical engagement by Christians everywhere. Readers are encouraged to reflect upon the case studies in direct conversation with the analysis and theological convictions laid out in chapter one, and to discern signs of hope and promising practices.

### ***Emerging Network for Reconciliation***

At the end of our remarkable journey at the Thailand Forum, Group 22 adopted a Pattaya Covenant (included in this Paper) during our closing worship service. We pledged to join in on-going mission by forming a global Christian network for reconciliation, and to invite others to join us. For information about that emerging network, see [www.reconciliationnetwork.com](http://www.reconciliationnetwork.com).

Responses and comments concerning this paper may be sent to:

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### **PATTAYA COVENANT**

Adopted by the members of Group 22: Reconciliation at the 2004 World Evangelization Forum in Pattaya Thailand, October 4, 2004

*“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:27-28<sup>1</sup>*

### **Who We Are**

We came to the 2004 Lausanne Forum in Pattaya, Thailand from six continents across God’s earth, sharing a vision for reconciliation. Although we arrived mostly as strangers, we leave as committed companions in a strong Christian bond. We gathered across historic and continuing divisions and many places of conflict: as black, Asian, Latin American, and white; different tribal and ethnic groups; Israeli and Palestinian; North and South; privileged and marginalized; women and men; as Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. We heard each others’ stories of pain and hope. We confessed that we in the Christian community are often part of the division and conflict. We listened, debated, prayed, sang and danced, and shared laughter and tears. We began

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations in the paper are from *Today’s New International Version*.

to see common convictions arise among us. We witnessed breakthroughs of unity which caused us to rejoice. And we find ourselves hoping for an on-going community of relationship and partnership.

### **Our Common Call**

We believe that reconciliation is God’s initiative. The Church is called to be a living sign of the one body of Christ. Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel and the church’s life and mission, and is integral to evangelism and justice. Reconciliation is a deep and costly process, and requires humility, forgiveness, courage and patience. We are committed to pursuing God’s reconciling mission in a world of broken relationships and destructive conflicts.

### **Our Commitments**

We pledge to continue and extend the community birthed in Pattaya, and to help each other be faithful ambassadors of reconciliation. Therefore, we shall:

- Pray for one another and for the Church;
- Practice confession and forgiveness in our personal lives, seeking healing;
- Stay in touch and gather to tell our stories, discern, help each other, learn about and lament destructive divisions and conflicts, and seek and celebrate signs of hope;
- Establish a network to forward relationship and partnership, and invite Christians across the world to join us;
- Advocate and speak prophetically for justice and reconciliation, including engaging church, civic, and political leaders, without compromising our biblical convictions;
- Contribute and share resources;
- Research, publish, communicate, and disseminate;
- Work humbly together as servants to seek the church’s renewal and to help mobilize the global Christian community to be partners in God’s reconciling mission.

### **Our Prayer**

We covenant before God and one another to live into these commitments. May God give us grace to do so:  
*“And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” 2 Corinthians 5:19-20.*

## **1. RECONCILIATION AS THE MISSION OF GOD**

*“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [the Son], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:19-20)*

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: The old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-20a)*

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20a)*

*“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:44-45)*

*“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:27-28)*

### **The Vision of Reconciliation**

The mission of God in our fallen, broken world is reconciliation. Sacred Scripture witnesses that God’s mission of reconciliation is holistic, including relationships with God, self, others, and creation. This mission has never changed from the Fall to the new creation in Christ, to its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus in the *eschaton*. God’s reconciling mission involves the very in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, as realized through Jesus’ incarnation, His life and ministry and preaching, and through His death and resurrection.

God’s initiative of reconciliation through Christ transforms believers into God’s new creation. With all of creation, we await our final and perfect transformation in the end of time. At that time, when Jesus returns, God’s mission will be complete. People of every nation, tribe, and language, gathered as one, will worship the Lamb, the tree of life and its leaves shall be for the healing of the nations, and the new heavens and earth shall make the reign of God a reality with all things reconciled to God (Romans 8:18-39, Revelation 7:9-17; 21-22:5).

In response to all this, the believer is called to participate in God’s mission of reconciliation. This includes obeying Jesus’ command to humbly make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), teaching them to follow the example of Jesus who suffered for a suffering world. The church is called to be a living sign of the one body of Christ, an agent of hope and holistic reconciliation in our broken and fragmented world.

A serious impediment to God’s mission of reconciliation in our time is not only the reality of destructive divisions and conflicts around the world, but quite often the church being caught up in these conflicts — places where the blood of ethnicity, tribe, racialism, sexism, caste, social class, or

Reconciliation is God’s initiative, restoring a broken world to God’s intentions by reconciling “to himself all things” through Christ (Colossians 1:19) including the relationship between people and God, between people and with God’s created earth. Christians participate with God’s mission by being transformed into ambassadors of reconciliation.

nationalism seems to flow stronger than the waters of baptism and our confession of Christ.

While the church’s suffering faith is evident in many conflicts, the guilt of Christians in intensifying the world’s brokenness is seriously damaging our witness to the gospel. The church’s captivity is both direct and indirect, whether actively furthering destruction and division, remaining silent or neutral in the face of it, or promoting a defective gospel. This is true of recent and current contexts including legalized apartheid (South Africa), “ethnic cleansing” (the Balkans), genocide (Rwanda), histories of racism and ethnocentrism (USA), terror and killing of civilian populations and bitter, unresolved social divisions (ranging from “sectarianism” in Northern Ireland, to Dalit “untouchables” and caste in India, to the plight of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, to the Korean peninsula, to Palestinians and Israelis). Christians are often bitterly divided on both sides.

In too many places, the blood of ethnicity, tribe, racialism, sexism, social class, or nationalism flows stronger than the waters of baptism and our confession of Christ.

This troubled situation calls for prayer, discernment, and repentance, and a critical reexamination of the very meaning of mission, evangelism, discipleship and even church in relation to God’s reconciling mission. This is particularly urgent given cases where vast areas of revivals and church planting have become vast killing fields (such as Rwanda 1994), with Christians slaughtering neighbours and even other Christians.

Yet even in the worst conflicts, signs of the quest for reconciliation can be detected in the church. Christians have shaped many of the world’s most hopeful breakthroughs for reconciliation. In becoming agents of biblically holistic reconciliation, we must learn to name and confess the sins of the past and present and encourage others to do the same, be willing to forgive, and live in new ways of repentance and costly peacemaking. Above all, Christians must be people of hope; hope in God’s victory in Christ and that, over time, reconciliation can break in, because this is God’s mission.

## **The Context of Reconciliation**

### ***The Social and Historical Context of Conflict***

God created humanity in God’s image, for natural union and wholeness of life with God, one another, and God’s material creation. The Fall shattered this union, resulting in the estrangement seen in Cain’s murder of Abel. While destructive conflict is rooted in this rupture, it cannot be explained solely in terms of wicked human hearts. Powerful historical and social forces, unjust systems, and “spiritual forces of evil” (Ephesians 6:12) are also part of the world’s brokenness. The transmission of the gospel and the ministry of the church do not run in a pure, separate historical stream, but are carried on inside of and tainted by the world’s poisoned, muddied histories. All the agents of brokenness must be discerned and confronted—personal, social, and spiritual.

In our shrinking and increasingly pluralistic and globalized world, manifestations of social division are intensifying. Destructive conflicts crying out for reconciliation include both open conflict and “quieter” conditions of persistent injustice, division, and separation. Four interrelated dimensions of historical social conflicts must be engaged: the past and its trauma; how that past is named and remembered; how the present is described and engaged; and how the future is imagined.

In terms of the past and its trauma, destructive social conflicts and realities do not drop like meteors from the sky. Behind each trauma are infective histories, particular social, In too many places, the blood of ethnicity, tribe, racialism, sexism, social

class, or nationalism flows stronger than the waters of baptism and our confession of Christ. economic, spiritual, institutional and political factors and powers, and the reality that the oppressed of yesterday often become the new oppressors, repeating cycles of destruction.<sup>2</sup>

Reconciliation is not forgetting the past. Yet naming and remembering the past well is difficult. Sharing a history in every social division are offenders and offended, passive bystanders and active peacemakers, with lines between them rarely agreed upon and alienated groups and the Christians within them holding tightly to conflicting versions of truth. In response to God’s love and justice, however, Christians are called to fearlessly seek and name the truth of what has happened, guided by repentance and forgiveness. This must involve seeking shared truth across divided lines. Deformed ways of remembering the past include denial, social amnesia, a spirit of unforgiveness and uncritical affirmation of one’s own group and its history.

In the present where we live, haunted memories, the unresolved past, and continuing trauma have a cumulative effect. These forces can so pervade a culture, a people, that they are passed on from generation to generation — perpetuating distrust, fear, bitterness, exclusion, retribution, and the politics and economics which often exploits these realities. Persistent unjust balances of societal power are also a consequence of the unresolved past and present. In the face of all this, divided groups easily resign themselves to separate and alienated communities, jostling for power. If militarism enters as an option of providing some with personal security while neglecting human security for all, conflicts rise to devastating levels.

Against these forces of the past and present, alienated groups cannot even imagine a future of friendship, solidarity or common life. Instead, they accept and live with permanent categories of another group as aliens, strangers or enemies: “black” and “white;” Hutu and Tutsi clean and “untouchable;” South and North Korean; and “terrorist” and “terrorized.” Fragmentation becomes normal, acceptable and even inevitable.

### ***The Church & Mission Context***

When Christians are passive bystanders and refuse to become constructive agents of reconciliation amidst such divisions and destructive conflicts, we are guilty of withholding love to a neighbour, the love of God is not manifested in our lives, and we give life to a defective gospel.

Numerous ideologies of escape steer Christians away from reconciliation and must be named and rejected by the church. These include:

- ***Dualistic theologies*** which are silent about social problems, name enemies as solely non-human evil spirits, preach the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation, or the sufficiency of social involvement without personal conversion in Christ;

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<sup>2</sup> The following examples are factors that can be found in past trauma which shapes the present and should be taken into account: genocide, civil war or cycles of violence and retribution; entire peoples dispossessed of and forcibly removed from their land; slavery; colonial dominance; economic oppression and injustice, and legalized or culturally-embedded segregation and marginalization; long-standing animosities and the politics of dehumanization and demonization; neutrality and silence in the face of atrocities and social evils; the quiet persistence of structures and practices (economic, social, political) that privilege some groups and marginalize others; bitter church schisms; theories of racial and genetic superiority; lust for power and domination; and trusting in military might more than costly peacemaking and redemptive suffering.

- ***Ethnocentrism, racialism, sexism or nationalism*** that promote the fallacy of any ethnic, cultural, gender or national group’s self-sufficiency, and promote loyalty to and the self-interest of one’s group as an end in itself. Ultimate loyalty is intended for Jesus alone, who calls us to love our neighbour as well as our enemies, and not only “our own”; The following examples are factors that can be found in past trauma which shapes the present and should be taken into account: genocide, civil war or cycles of violence and retribution; entire peoples dispossessed of and forcibly removed from their land; slavery; colonial dominance; economic oppression and injustice, and legalized or culturally-embedded segregation and marginalization; long-standing animosities and the politics of dehumanization and demonization; neutrality and silence in the face of atrocities and social evils; the quiet persistence of structures and practices (economic, social, political) that privilege some groups and marginalize others; bitter church schisms; theories of racial and genetic superiority; lust for power and domination; and trusting in military might more than costly peacemaking and redemptive suffering.
- ***A false belief in God’s creation of essentially different people groups***, justifying permanent boundaries between them. This includes the Hamitic ideology, that teaches that God has cursed the descendents of Ham, Noah’s son, creating separate orders of peoples—some inferior and some superior. This is a heresy. Rooted in this ideology was racial segregation in the USA, apartheid in South Africa and genocide in Rwanda, which many Christians supported, along with believing in their underlying ideology;
- ***A spirit of individualism*** seen in Christian disunity, competitiveness, or deplorable schisms and splits which infect many denominations, churches, Christian institutions and ministries. This disunity and egoism blinds our ability to discern the world’s need for reconciliation and seriously harms the church’s ministry;
- ***Adopting numbers of conversions or church plants as a primary measure of Christianity’s growth***, allowing churches or ministries to grow with superficial discipleship, homogeneously, or in ways that perpetuate histories and systems of separation and alienation. This tacit approval of permanent boundaries and segregated lives limited to “people like us” falsely blesses the chasm between alienated groups and disables our ability to be self-critical;<sup>3</sup>
- ***An underlying message of cheap grace*** that encourages shallow resolutions, a superficial discipleship powerless to engage social pain, and reconciliation without repentance. A biblical theology of the cross and suffering is needed to renew the church’s thinking and life.

Against these ideologies of escape, the church must formulate theological alternatives that encourage authentic reconciliation.

Regarding other situations, when sweeping revivals and rapid church growth occur, Christians must restrain from triumphalism. In too many cases, Christians have been implicated in destructive conflict which has overtaken vast areas of revival

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<sup>3</sup> In South Africa, for example, the “homogeneous unit principle” was popular among those who supported apartheid. In India, church growth has often tacitly accepted caste divisions, while the same has happened in the U.S.A. regarding racial and ethnic divisions.



and church planting. The church has failed to be self-critical or discerning enough, or to adequately answer “How did this happen, and where did Christians fail?”

In addition, Christians cannot be neutral in a time of social crisis. Too often we are silent about destructive conditions occurring around us, or in our world. Any dichotomy between the evangelistic and the prophetic is false. Along with leading believers into personal holiness, the church is charged to have a prophetic social presence. The church must learn to speak the truth to powers. This calls us to “discern the will of God” concerning societal powers and governing authorities that have immense influence over the lives of Christians, over our non-Christian neighbours and over destructive conflicts and societal realities.

The capacity to be a prophetic church is being seriously eroded by three stances. A religious *pluralist stance* promotes social transformation without personal conversion, losing the uniqueness and lordship of Christ. A *quietist stance* ignores social evil, is silent when people suffer persecution, and preaches the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation, losing public social witness. An *assimilationist stance* misuses the Bible to support the status quo of social or political exclusion, or weds Christian interests with particular governing authorities, losing all prophetic distance.

In addition, the church often shares in the sin of comfortable neutrality, the complacency of those who find themselves on the side of social privilege and fail to work vigorously to transform the status quo. This is at least true of those who tend to preside over the levers of theological power and influence. Thus the theology of the church is often in support of the status quo, or asks very few critical questions, losing all prophetic voice and domesticating the gospel.

Yet God’s forgiveness in Christ makes possible the church’s faithful confrontation of past and present trauma and injustices. As communities of Christians learn to model confession, forgiveness and costly peacemaking in lives marked by joy, we proclaim a new future and offer a vision of hope to a broken world.

## **The Hope for Reconciliation**

### ***Biblical and Theological Foundations of Reconciliation***

Amidst the world’s profound brokenness, God’s peace in the risen Christ is now powerfully at work, seeking to reconcile humanity to God’s intended purposes for union with God, one another, and the material creation, resulting in the flourishing of all. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture witnesses to God’s total mission “*to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven*” (Colossians 1:15-20). The fullness of reconciliation is friendship with God in Jesus Christ, witnessed to in Christ’s two-fold command to love God and neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40). Christ has prepared the way for reconciliation by abolishing the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, making of the two one new humanity, establishing peace (Ephesians 2:11-18). Reconciliation is a sign of God’s presence in the world, of the kingdom of God drawing near.

The wholeness that God seeks to bring to all areas of brokenness is captured by the rich Scriptural notion of *shalom*. This is *shalom* as rooted within the full biblical story and not in any nationalistic or politically partisan sense. From the original wholeness of God’s creation, broken by the Fall, to God’s response to initiate restoration through covenant, to Christ tearing down the Jew-Gentile barrier, *shalom* proclaims peace as God’s peace in distinction to the world’s: “*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you*” (John 14:27). *Shalom* as God’s peace envisions the wholeness, well-being

and flourishing of all people and the rest of creation both individually and corporately in their interrelatedness with God and with each other. *Shalom* as God’s peace encompasses all dimensions of human life, including the spiritual, physical, cognitive, emotional, social, societal and economic. *Shalom* pursues mercy, truth, justice and peacefulness through both personal conversion in Christ and social transformation.<sup>4</sup>

Because God created all persons in God’s image, reconciliation also proclaims God’s love for every human being. One crucial implication is that Christians must stand against any destructive or dehumanizing barriers built up by one person or group of people against another, whether they are Christian or not.

One theological implication of the above three paragraphs is this: God’s mission of holistic reconciliation is the overall context for evangelism and making disciples. Reconciliation with God is essential and Christians must be agents of that restoration. However, to stress evangelism without also being agents of holistic reconciliation betrays the full truth of the gospel and the mission of God.

In view of all this, Christians are called to faithfully embody God’s total reconciling mission. Through new life given in Christ, the Holy Spirit’s power, the church’s faithful teaching, and on-going Christian practices, people can be deeply transformed toward loving God, neighbour and enemies. Only in this radical journey of conversion can Christians develop the skills to resist destructive conflicts and live out a way of being which, over time, can heal and reconcile.

The church’s ministry of reconciliation flows from a call to *being* a reconciled community. Christ prayed for the visible unity of the church, and intimately connected Christian unity to Christ being known as the One sent from God: *“I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me”* (John 17:20-23)

The church’s ministry should also be profoundly shaped by the truth that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Christian

We are led by Christ crucified to fully engage painful historical conditions and by the risen Christ to explode walls and barriers and build new forms of common life.

discipleship is led by the crucified Christ to fully engage the painful historical conditions of separation, animosity, and destruction in the earthly realm, refusing “cheap grace” and shallow resolutions. Christian discipleship is also led by the risen Christ to live in ways which explode old walls and barriers and build hopeful new forms of Christian community and just society between divided peoples.

Reconciliation and the quest for justice go hand in hand. There cannot be reconciliation if sin is not named, judged publicly and condemned. In the face of oppression, to reject vengeance is a double injustice — to the afflicted and to God’s wrath against evil. What is crucial is how we appropriate vengeance: *“Do not take revenge . . . but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge, I will repay,’ says the Lord”* (Romans 12:19). In Jesus’ death, God judged all sins, abuses and atrocities. God’s forgiveness in Christ “while we were yet sinners” guides our pursuit of justice toward healing. One mark of holistic reconciliation is

<sup>4</sup> For examples of the biblical understanding of *shalom*, see: Leviticus 26:4-6; Psalms 34:14; Isaiah 1:16-17, 32, 11:6-9a, 16-17; Jeremiah 29:10-14; Ezekiel 34:25-31; Amos 5:14-15; Micah 4:2-4. The New Testament carries this vision forward in the Greek concept of *eirene* (“peace”): Mark 4:37-29; Luke 4:16-21; Ephesians 2:12-14; Revelation 7:9, 21:1-4.

a commitment to pursuing justice that is primarily restorative rather than retributive, keeping open the hope for future common life between enemies and alienated peoples.

At the same time, we must heed Scripture’s exhortation that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood.” It is crucial to recognize an unseen, heavenly dimension to the quest for reconciliation in the world, a struggle against certain destructive forces and their ideologies, against “rulers,” “powers of this dark world,” “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:10-18). This calls for a deep life of prayer and discernment “in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18) at the centre of Christian ministry amidst destructive conflict and proclaims that reconciliation is ultimately a matter of God’s power and victory.

Difference itself, or differences, are not necessarily the problem calling for reconciliation. In many ways, diversity of peoples and cultures is a gift, such as another language opening up a new world to us, or another culture as a gift to enrich us. Often the problem is how the will to dominate exploits the differences. While God’s mission of reconciliation does not obliterate human diversity, it does seek to bring friendship with God and neighbour in a way which transforms human cultures. We must carefully and locally discern where the gospel affirms culture, where it opposes, and where it encourages transformation.

Christians are called to lives of hospitality, to open themselves to the stranger, the alien, the outcast, and the enemy. Such openness radically changes one’s relationship to one’s culture, and how one engages cultures in transforming ways. The pursuit of reconciliation is an ongoing struggle. This quest should not be expected to end conflict in this world, but rather to transform it. True reconciliation and shalom is only in the *eschaton*, when all things are reconciled in Christ. While full reconciliation does not happen in this life, there is hope of substantial healing.

### ***The Scope of Reconciliation***

Every act seeking reconciliation, no matter how small, matters greatly to God. The scope of reconciliation runs from healing in one person’s life, to two individuals overcoming animosities, to nations and long-divided peoples seeking to do so. We are led by Christ crucified to fully engage painful historical conditions and by the risen Christ to explode walls and barriers and build new forms of common life.

This work of becoming peacemakers between divided peoples is not secondary or optional, but is central to Christian mission along with planting churches and making disciples. Indeed, this costly work and the persecution it may bring bears witness to some who are otherwise unable to hear the gospel, and is at the core of making disciples who “*obey everything I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20).

This peacemaking work must be theologically grounded. In our emerging world, some are seeking a common ground of universality to provide meaning for “one world.” Scripture testifies that God in Jesus Christ alone is the centre of hope for the world’s peace, and also that all of humanity is created in God’s image. Following Jesus’ definition of our neighbour (Luke 10:25-37), Christians are called to seek truthful engagement, peacefulness and just community with all people — especially strangers, enemies, the poor and those considered outcasts both ethnically and religiously.

At the same time, there is a qualitative difference between how reconciliation can be pursued outside versus inside community with Christ. The Lordship of Christ claims the whole lives of persons and alienated groups, something no other authority including the state can demand. Christ offers forgiveness and healing which no legal effort or human attempt can effect

and calls His disciples to a repentance and joy which is radical. Christ calls for far more than admitting guilt, but deep contrition, and a costliness and depth to healing broken relationships that goes far beyond tolerance or peaceful coexistence.

This witness begins at home. For the church to make peace, she herself must embody God’s peace as a living sign of God’s reconciled community. Baptism identifies believers as one church family, the body of Christ. Within their families, local churches, and the larger Christian family and our tragic divisions, Christians are called to a special witness of fidelity, sacrificial love, boundary crossing, and common prayer, seeking to heal conflicts following our Lord’s words in Matthew 18:15-20. Wherever Christian leaders will not pray together and seek reconciliation, the church’s mission is seriously harmed.

Biblical reconciliation also leads Christians beyond church circles to vigorously analyze, engage and influence our local communities, nations and world as witnesses for reconciliation and just community. Without sacrificing our Christian convictions, we should seek to partner creatively with people of good will to promote peace, including with people of other faiths. At the heart of the church’s public engagement is a prophetic responsibility to call political authorities to account. Governing authorities are subject to the sovereign Lord for their conduct in ensuring just order and peaceful relations.

Certain legal, governmental and national efforts can bring a cessation of hostilities and public pursuit of truth and just practices that the church alone cannot bring and for which the church should advocate. Christian partnership with such efforts can even elevate their outcomes in profound ways (as with South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the 1990s). Yet involvement with governmental efforts should not become the primary end or determinative sphere of the church’s reconciling mission. They must be approached carefully, critically, and provisionally.

The church must never compromise its identity or prophetic voice.

### ***The Process of Reconciliation***

Reconciliation is a long and costly process. Reconciliation is not a one-time event, or a linear journey of progress, but addresses multiple causes and relations that intermingle. Christians are called to be intentional and energetic in pursuing reconciliation, to go out of their way to love their neighbour who is difficult to love.

This costly journey requires hope, nurtured in practices where we listen to God in worship, Scripture reading, and prayer. As we open to the pain of a broken world, we hear Reconciliation is a long and costly process in which all groups are transformed. This journey requires hope, nurtured in listening to God.

God’s word that ultimately, in the *eschaton*, all things will be reconciled in Christ. In the meantime, we do our part. It is this hope that keeps the process moving forward. In biblical understanding, no one party in a historic conflict — whether majority or minority, powerful or powerless, aggressor or afflicted — has the greater burden to take the first step toward reconciliation. The initiative for reconciliation begins wherever people find the courage to “lose themselves” and take ownership of pain: to no longer deny the conditions of trauma, to embrace the predicament of division, and to join the struggle for transformation by discovering the human face of the “other.”

Reconciliation is a long and costly process in which all groups are transformed. This journey requires hope, nurtured in listening to God.

Too often, we ask forgiveness of God without asking forgiveness of people. Following the example of Jesus’ love for enemies and forgiveness for undeserving sinners, Christians are unconditionally called to seek within themselves for and to actively offer both heartfelt confession and genuine forgiveness. We do this without promise that our action will be received or reciprocated, or that justice will occur. Establishing a social atmosphere of relative safety and security is crucial for such actions to become widely possible, especially for those who have been marginalized.

While confession or forgiveness can come from one direction, reconciliation between divided peoples requires a risky, mutual journey of intentional relationship-building in which all groups are transformed and called to costly sacrifices. Reconcilers may be seen as traitors by their own people, and often become a bridge painfully walked on by both sides. Both perpetrators of destructive conflict and bystanders who remain safely silent and privileged are called to accept responsibility for the condition of those wounded and afflicted. Their confession and sorrow opens a conversation about the conflict and its genuineness is often tested in a willingness to take actions of reparation to counter the consequences of harm.

One further barrier to reconciliation is the residue of unresolved bitterness toward people and groups who have offended us. There is a need to face the residue and pain inflicted upon us as first steps toward reconciliation. Such courage cannot be forced. Yet many of history’s most powerful reconciliation movements have been birthed among Christians of the historically marginalized and afflicted who proclaim Christ’s triumph over evil, speak truth without demonizing the other side, pray for and engage their persecutors, seek forgiveness and work for a future of just community and common life across the lines of division.

### ***Indications of Reconciliation***

Only God knows what true reconciliation looks like, and the fullness when a countless multitude from every people and language will worship before the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-10). Since reconciliation is an ongoing quest, the challenge is to point out where we are and to mark signs of hope. As reconciliation efforts move forward, conflict and resistance may often increase. Yet indications of reconciliation can become the very signs of God’s kingdom breaking into this world.

The church itself ought to be a key indication of hope, a living alternative, infusing and challenging the social sphere with a more radical vision of God’s reconciliation.

Christians should eagerly seek these indications of hope, from the church living the alternative, to practices of faithfulness, to changes in

society. The church itself ought to be a key indication of hope, a living alternative, infusing and challenging the social sphere with a more radical vision of God’s reconciliation. Examples of the church visibly living the alternative include: across long-divided lines, Christians form holy friendships, offer hospitality, share meals, pray and read Scripture together, celebrate holy communion, mutually confess and forgive, and forge common mission; unlearn habits of superiority, inferiority and separation; celebrate together, and praise and worship God while engaging the world’s pain and working towards *shalom*; free Christian institutions of discrimination and unjust use of resources; show remarkable joy amidst difficult work; marry across ethnic boundaries and divided lines, with blended families becoming a sign of a new

The church itself ought to be a key indication of hope, a living alternative, infusing and challenging the social sphere with a more radical vision of God’s reconciliation in community. At the heart of the church’s alternative witness is the birth and perseverance of blended congregations where historically separated peoples share deep, common life.

Christians understand faithfulness as shaped by the cross, as a costly discipleship that re-defines effectiveness. Faithful practices of social engagement, even if they seem to result in no visible change, are also profound indications of hope amidst destructive conflicts. Examples are when Christians forgive persecutors; prophetically challenge unjust situations; aid afflicted neighbours; absorb evil without passing it on; witness to Christ amidst hostilities; offer hospitality across divides; continue seeking peace even when called traitors; suffer, or even die, rather than participate in destruction.

The church should also eagerly work for indications of reconciliation in society. These include: enemy leaders enter dialogue, violence stops, persecution is reduced, or hostilities cease; crimes and destruction by all sides are brought to light in a context of restorative justice; loved ones and the larger society learn the fate of victims; deeper truth around a painful shared history is appropriately and communally remembered; a state of tolerance is achieved where estranged groups agree to live peaceably; more just societal structures and practices emerge; children of hostile groups begin to go to school and play together; inter-marriage increases across historic lines of separation; neighbourhoods become blended communities of shared, peaceful life.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### ***Placing Reconciliation at the Heart of Christian Mission in the 21st Century***

The alienation of divided peoples and the suffering of the afflicted cries out from our world’s brokenness, from both open, destructive conflicts and the more hidden conflicts. These conditions call the church to listen to the pain and to God, to lament the divisions, to repent and forgive where necessary, and to be transformed as agents of healing, Christian witness and positive change.

Thus we invite Christians everywhere to carefully consider the following recommendations:

1. ***To embrace biblically holistic reconciliation at the heart of the gospel and Christian life and mission in the 21st century, and as integral to evangelism and justice.*** This involves intentionally embedding this vision into the mission of our churches and institutions, and understanding reconciliation as a long and costly process, requiring hope from God.
2. ***To humbly examine ourselves in the Christian community, seeking to identify and dismantle the escapist ideologies and practices which steer us away from reconciliation.*** This is grounded in the hard work of biblical study, social and theological analysis, corporate discernment, conversation with communities we have been divided from, and prayer.
3. ***To cross the difficult divisions, barriers, and borders to talk face to face with and listen to those we are separated from.*** This must involve seeking to talk and pray with Christians on the other side, listening to God and each other and

praying for the unity Jesus prayed for (John 17:20-21). Christian pastors and leaders should be at the forefront of these boundary-crossing efforts.

4. **To preach and teach radical discipleship with Christ and costly peacemaking as normative of Christian faith.** This involves presenting discipleship as a journey with God and people which, over time, transforms our desires and opens up radical new ways of loving God, neighbour, and enemies.
5. **To refuse neutrality or silence in relationship to destructive conditions.** We urge the church to be vigilant to discern conditions of escalating dehumanization and injustice (such as those the church worldwide failed to name in Rwanda leading to the 1994 genocide) and to engage church, civic and political leaders as advocates without compromising our biblical convictions. It is a powerful form of protection for national voices of truth and justice when the church outside knows of them and speaks against threats to them, especially from countries of great international power.
6. **To intentionally shape pastors and congregations able to live the alternative and work toward shalom.** These Christian leaders and communities will need to learn the practices of naming the conflicts and root causes for what they are; to serve, listen and bear witness across divisions and barriers; to comfort and bind up the afflicted; to seek and celebrate signs of hope through both small and large gestures and measures; to support peacemaking efforts in the larger community; and to bring former strangers and alienated peoples into common worship, friendship and mission under the lordship of Christ.
7. **To joyfully and publicly proclaim in our Christian preaching and life God’s victory and God’s future of reconciling “all things” in Christ.** Amidst profound brokenness and pain, we must learn what it means to be bearers of hope, who faithfully bear witness to what is not seen, to the God who raised Jesus from the dead, defeating sin, evil, and the dark powers of this world.

**Definitions:** Five key concepts in the paper are understood as follows:

**Reconciliation:** Reconciliation is God’s initiative, seeking “to reconcile to himself all things” through Christ (Colossians 1:19). Reconciliation is grounded in God restoring the world to God’s intentions, the process of restoring the brokenness between people and God, within people, between people and with God’s created earth. Reconciliation between people is a mutual journey, requiring reciprocal participation. It includes a willingness to acknowledge wrongs done, extend forgiveness, and make restorative changes that help build trust so that truth and mercy, justice and peace dwell together.

**God’s mission:** The Christian faith embraces reconciliation as the mission of God in our fallen and broken world, accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ and entrusted to the church through people who participate by being transformed into ambassadors of reconciliation in a broken world.

**Destructive Conflict:** Conflict is a condition of our broken world after the Fall and can become either constructive or destructive. Conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties — whether persons, institutions, people groups and communities, or nations — that is rooted in incompatible goals, positions, views, needs or behaviours. Through either open destruction or quiet persistence of practices and structures, conflict becomes destructive by seriously damaging or dividing

people and communities, thus prohibiting them from being neighbours who love one another. Destructive conflict thus becomes a condition of severely broken relationships between people, which becomes embodied and perpetuated historically, personally and institutionally and employs instruments such as actions, words, ideologies, policies, systems, or weapons to cause physical, psychological, or social damage or division which furthers the world's brokenness. The consequences of destructive conflict range from severely damaged emotions and memories, to socially alienated people groups, to the inability of groups to flourish physically, socially, economically and spiritually, to death of people and destruction of societies and of God's material creation.

**Shalom:** *Shalom* is a theological concept rooted in Scripture. The biblical witness speaks of *shalom* as a state of wholeness, well being, peacefulness and flourishing of all that God has created in all of its dimensions and all of its relationships. *Shalom* includes right relationships of human beings with God, within themselves, with one another and with the created world. *Shalom* is always rooted in justice and holiness.

**Restorative Justice:** Restorative justice is used in this paper as defined by Desmond Tutu in *No Future Without Forgiveness*, "the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victims and the perpetrators, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offence."<sup>5</sup>

## 2. “ROOTS AND REALITIES” VIGNETTES

### The Dalit Oppressed People of India by Ken Gnanakan

The Dalits or “oppressed people” of India, numbering over 200 million as roughly estimated today, have lived in a cycle of discrimination and despair for over 3000 years. The Hindu caste system specifies four major caste hierarchical levels but the Dalits are outside of the system and that is why called “outcastes” previously.

Deep-rooted divisions within the Indian society have resulted in rejection, humiliation, poverty and suffering for the downtrodden Dalits. The caste system denies them adequate education, safe drinking water, and the right to own land or a home in rural India.

Although laws against caste discrimination have been passed and many Dalits have been educated and lifted out of their plight, widespread intolerance continues towards many. Large numbers of Dalits and low-caste Hindu have been turning to Christians for help, although similar numbers are also going to the Muslims, Buddhists and other minority groups. About 70% of Indian Christians are stated to be from Dalit backgrounds.

In a major conversion event some years ago, millions of Dalits were expected to convert to Christianity. Discerning Christians were asking some pertinent questions. Is the church able to handle this sudden growth? Will the church be able to accept these people and show Christlike compassion? The reason for such questions is clear. The church itself is torn apart with

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<sup>5</sup> Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 55.



all kinds of caste groups, schisms, factions and divisive conflicts. Superficial conversions in the past allowed for casteism to continue albeit in a sophisticated way and lower caste converts have faced discrimination.

While the Dalits really need to be lifted out of their pitiable plight and brought into the Christian fold, we must first seek reconciliation of such influences within the church itself. Then, Christians must strive for reconciliation of Dalits into the mainstream of the Indian society. The Christian message of barriers being broken down and oneness restored in humanity (Ephesians 3.6) still waits to be actualized in the Indian church.

*Ken Gnanakan is President of the ACTS Academy of Higher Education in Bangalore, India. His books include Kingdom Concerns and Proclaiming Christ in a Pluralistic Context.*

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### **Sectarianism & the Church in Northern Ireland by David Porter**

Ireland was never a part of the Roman Empire and the 5th century church planted by Patrick was free of the Romanization that assisted the spread of Christianity. It was the missionary scholar monks of Ireland who were at the heart of the re-evangelisation of Europe after the empire collapsed. Their reward was the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to bring the church under the control of Rome and the land under the control of an English King.

History therefore does not allow us to view the religious conflict in Ireland in two dimensional terms, Roman Catholic native and Protestant colonist. Both, in their own time, were the religion of the outside power. Both carry responsibility for the brew of land, culture, politics, tribe and religion that has brought division and conflict.

Evangelicalism is no less complicit. In 1859 Evangelical revival provided a unifying experience for diverse Protestant traditions. This spiritual rapprochement facilitated common political cause in the fight to maintain the union with Britain. It is from this period that the current conflict takes its religious shape.

Sectarian violence marked the formation of Northern Ireland in 1921. This period also saw a second Evangelical revival. In the minds of many this reinforced the link between God and Ulster. To this day Dr. Ian Paisley looks both to Lord Carson, the political leader of the time, and to the revivalist W.P. Nicholson, to legitimate his own brand of religious fundamentalism and politics in defence of Northern Ireland.

The partition of Ireland left the North with an unstable population mix. One third found themselves a Catholic minority on the wrong side of the Irish national border. The rest, while now a Protestant majority in a British province, still experienced themselves as a minority on the island as a whole. Siege and insecurity left little room for magnanimity in relationships with neighbours. With the outbreak of civil unrest in 1968 these sectarian fault lines came to the fore.

During thirty years of terrorist violence, the church maintained its pastoral presence to the respective communities. There were also significant prophetic acts and statements by religious leaders from both sides, including, from 1987, the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI). The peace process that led to the negotiating of the ceasefires in 1994 was initiated by priests from the Redemptorist order, with the support of a range of ecumenical and evangelical clergy and reconciliation groups. Despite attempts to marginalize the contribution of the church and the reality of the church's historic complicity in the conflict, faith based and inspired initiative has been at the heart of the search for peace.

Since the Belfast Agreement of 1998 the focus has been on how we deal with the past and come to terms with the hurt visited on each other. Neither side wants to concede legitimacy to the other. While most paramilitary combatants regret that their actions in the “troubles” were necessary, they do not apologise for what they did. Many of those not directly involved in the paramilitaries continue to deny the endemic nature of sectarianism in society and by inference, their responsibility for creating the conditions of enmity in which the violence was nurtured.

Many Evangelicals continue to oppose the peace process as a concession to their historic enemies. Reconciliation remains a distant prospect, a period of political stability and communal tolerance our best hope.

*David Porter is co-founder and director of ECONI, the Evangelical Contribution On Northern Ireland. He is specifically responsible for ECONI's work in dialogue with both Irish Republican and British Loyalist paramilitary groups in their moves towards peace, building relationships across the political divide and enabling a credible evangelical contribution to the British and Irish governments on the peace process in Ireland. He is a member of the UK Board of the Evangelical Alliance*

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### **Politics, Trauma and Prayer in Sierra Leone by Samuel G. Menyongar**

Sierra Leone was the first country in West Africa to receive the gospel in 1605. After more than 200 years of the existence of the gospel, there are only 11.72% Christians in Sierra Leone . . . 568,934 people within a total 4.5 million population. The annual growth of Christianity in this country is +2.9%. There are 2,000 churches and 9,000 mosques. Sierra Leone was a colony of Great Britain and gained her independence on April 27, 1960. The government that took over from the British misruled the country for 27 years. Under the All People's Congress and President Siaka Steven there was rampant corruption, nepotism, tribalism and ritualistic killings for power. The country deteriorated under this regime and this led to a brutal civil war which lasted for 10 years.

Under the leadership of Foday Sankoh, the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) was established and entered Sierra Leone from Liberia in 1991. They raped, maimed, amputated, kidnapped, conscripted child soldiers, destroyed homes and government infrastructures. There was total anarchy. This also divided the church on tribal lines. By the grace of God the church came together for prayers and this was on a rotational basis from church to church. Through the International Missionary Centre of which I work and the International Prayer Council headed by Brother John Robb, a prayer summit was held from May 2-4, 2000 where more than 1,500 pastors and intercessors were brought together to pray for the healing, reconciliation and forgiveness of the nation. Each region was prayed for by a person from that region, sins of forefathers were confessed and repented.

Forgiveness was asked and pastors from other regions hugged each other and cried. At the end of the summit, the leader of the RUF was arrested and the RUF was disbanded. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council headed by Johnny Paul Koroma was also present at this meeting. He prayed for reconciliation and healing for the nation and his group was also disbanded.

There were influences from the west and from the West Africa sub-region. However, through the decision for the church leaders to come together, God brought peace and healing. Today different denominations are coming together to discuss the way forward for the spiritual condition of the country.

*Samuel Menyongar is a pastor with Bethel World Outreach Ministries International, and directs the International Missionary Centre based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. He conducts training for leaders mission trips, interdenominational unity and reconciliation workshops, and prayer networks.*

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### **Religion, Race, and Identity in the Sudanese Conflict by Julia Duany**

Independent Sudan’s conflict between the Arab/Islamic North and the African/Christian South has brought disorder, deprivation and death to southern Sudan. Many nations have offered help, but the net result of intervention has been to prolong the conflict. The war has taken a toll on human life, especially in the South. The majority of Sudanese suffer, since productive resources are diverted into means of coercion and defence.

Long-standing policies of Arabization and Islamization are the North’s attempt to correct decades of Western influence in the South. Southerners see their interests and institutions subordinated to Arab and Islamic agendas and have consistently demanded their right to self-determination.

In this context, religion, race, identity and language are the instruments of social control and change. Christianity has come to embody political and social rejection of Islam. This symbolism has intensified during the past twenty years, uniting those in opposition to Islamist control.

Consequently, the Christian witness is used to rally people to get behind a political bandwagon and people are not hearing the true message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The lack of knowledge continues because war, displacement and social disruption have limited the opportunities available for theological training and education.

*Julia Duany of Sudan is co-founder of South Sudanese Friends International, supporting grassroots communities in self-help and reconciliation projects, and is a research associate at the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University, USA Her expertise is women and social conflict in Africa. She is author of Making Peace and Nurturing Life: Reflections of an African Woman about a Journey of Struggle and Hope.*

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### **The Church and Post-Apartheid Tensions between Coloured, Black and White In South Africa’s Western Cape by Esme Bowers**

The realities of post-apartheid South Africa have created a fertile environment for change and high expectations for those at the grassroots, especially from the previously disadvantaged peoples.

There has always been a division between the White, Coloured, Indian and Black on the statute books of the previous regime. Many of the Coloured and Indian people identified themselves as Black and actively participated in the liberation of South Africa. They expected the same restorative justice as the Black community, but the reality is that preferential treatment is being given to programs that enhance the development of Black people. The Coloured community feel that during apartheid they were not “White enough to enjoy the privileges of the White community,” and now 10 years into the new democracy they are not “Black enough to enjoy the privileges given to the Black community.”

This has also impacted not only society but also the church and caused church division in the city of Cape Town. The church is not able to be a prophetic voice to those in government because we are fragmented, nor are we able to engage in transformative activities if only one sector of the population is active. We need Black, Indian, White and coloured people working together as the church. Society judges the church because of its division, not only denominationally but also racially and the government is not taking the voice of the church seriously. The question is often asked, “who do you represent” and if not the whole church, credibility is lost.

Cape Town has a population of 60% Coloured people (the Western Cape has the country’s highest percentage). The expectation of “their time has come” has not been realized and this has led to the church in Cape Town being polarized on racial grounds. In other parts of South Africa most leadership positions have been given to Black people. There is a certain expectation, due to affirmative action, that leadership in the church should be Black, yet in the Western Cape this is not so. The Coloured people in this province are descendants from a mixture of Khoi San (the indigenous people of the Cape), black African tribes, European (The French, Dutch, British and German) and the Indian Island peoples (Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion, Indonesia, Malaysia).

Coloured church leaders are flexing their muscles and organizing separate mass church gatherings excluding other races deliberately. May I suggest that this comes from both fear and prejudice carried over from the past. The fears are:

1. If Whites take over they will continue to oppress those of colour. Many have had 40 years of this kind of leadership and are not prepared to even give Whites any leadership positions or responsibilities.
2. Why should Blacks be included in the leadership? Coloureds are the majority population in the area and are they not able to lead their “own people?”
3. It is said that “Black people have an advantage and are taking over many areas of influence in other parts of SA,” “we should lead our own people,” “it is our right,” “this is our land” and “the Western Cape belongs to the mixed peoples.”

The critical issue is for the whole Church to engage in discussion, truly listen to each other, develop relationships and find constructive ways to resolve these issues. *Esmé Bowers is a founding member of the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa. She serves as National Chairperson of African Enterprise involved in evangelism and reconciliation in Africa, and is Continental Chairperson of the Pan African Women’s Association*

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### **The Sources of the So-called Chinese Problem in Indonesia by Paulus S. Widjaja**

Indonesia has been haunted by conflict between the Chinese and the indigenous<sup>6</sup> for centuries. Many times in history the conflict erupted into violent conflict that took the lives of tens of thousands of people. Although the conflict looks like an ethnic

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<sup>6</sup> The use of the term “indigenous” does not reflect acceptance of the idea that there is such thing as pure “indigenous” people in Indonesia. All the ancestors of the present day Indonesian people came from elsewhere. The term is used simply because it has been commonly used by the people of Indonesia to distinguish between the local people from those considered foreigners, especially the Chinese.

conflict between the Chinese and the indigenous, a closer look at the conflict will reveal the fact that it is more likely to be rooted in the policies of the ruling regime than in pure inter-ethnic sentiment.<sup>7</sup> It is not because the two different ethnic groups essentially hate each other, but because the two ethnic groups have been made to hate each other in the name of ethnic differences by the ruling regime. There is thus a social set-up that makes these two groups of people to have prejudice against each other and to be ready to inflict harm on each other.

Such a social set-up can be traced back to the time of Dutch colonialism when the Dutch colonials were practicing the politics of *divide et impera*. Armed with these politics, the Dutch colonials kept breaking off the relations between kingdoms, between rulers and between social groups in Indonesia so that they were in continuous wars with each other, becoming weak and easy to be defeated. The purpose of the strategy was to enable the powerful to take control over the nation easily at the expense of peace and harmony, even people’s lives. Ethnic differences are thus seen more as a curse to this multiethnic nation than a blessing.

Simply pointing our fingers to the government policies, however, is not sufficient. The material and spiritual worlds are never completely separated. True, the social set-up should be blamed for the creation of inter-ethnic conflict in Indonesia. Yet that social set-up has also nurtured hatred and prejudice in the hearts, minds and souls of both the Chinese and the indigenous against each other. These perverted hearts, minds and souls, in turn, encourage the sustenance and expansion of the unjust social set-up because the evil power that has permeated and controlled the unjust social set-up is also permeating and controlling the hearts, minds and souls of the people within that structure. In other words, there is reciprocity between the social structure and the character of the people who live in that structure. In a normal situation, a Javanese may not hate a Chinese just because the latter is a Chinese, or a Chinese hate a Sundanese just because the latter is a Sundanese. However, due to the racist social set-up, a Javanese may eventually hate a Chinese precisely because the latter is a Chinese and a Chinese hates a Sundanese precisely because the latter is a Sundanese.

The so-called Chinese problem is thus rooted not in ethnic differences between the Chinese and the indigenous, but in the hatred and prejudice between them and in the unjust social set-up that is established to segregate them for the interests of the ruling regime. The two, the social set-up and the character, cannot be separated. The problem of hatred and prejudice cannot stand alone, because the hatred and prejudice are supported by the social structure. The problem of social structure also cannot stand alone, because the social structure is designed and expanded on the basis of hatred and prejudice. So we have to approach the Chinese problem comprehensively. We have to give attention to both the interiority and the exteriority of human beings.

<sup>6</sup> The use of the term “indigenous” does not reflect acceptance of the idea that there is such thing as pure “indigenous” people in Indonesia. All the ancestors of the present day Indonesian people came from elsewhere. The term is used simply because it has been commonly used by the people of Indonesia to distinguish between the local people from those considered foreigners, especially the Chinese.

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<sup>7</sup> Ignas Kleden, “Stratifikasi Etnis dan Diskriminasi” in *Pri-NonPri: Mencari Format Baru Pembauran*. (Indigenous-Non-indigenous: In Search of a New Format of Assimilation) ed. Moch Sa’dun M. (Jakarta: PT Pustaka Cidesindo and Yayasan Adikarya Ikapi and the Ford Foundation, 1999), 155.

Unfortunately, the Indonesian churches have been threatened by two kinds of evil so that they can give witness to Christ amidst the so-called Chinese problem, namely, a dualistic theology and an uncritical attitude toward the powers.

First, a dualistic theology. In this theology, many Indonesian churches see the enemies of the church as non-human evil spirits in the air. The church then prefers to preach “good news about heaven,” to take care of spiritual matters only, while keeping silent about concrete problems in society. The church intentionally distances itself from human social problems.<sup>8</sup>

The second threat is an uncritical attitude toward the powers. Eka Darmaputera points out that, in relation to the three social forces in Indonesia: the bureaucrats (of both government and military), the Muslims and the masses, the Indonesian churches are closer to the bureaucrats than to the other groups, partly because they are afraid to stand in solidarity with the masses in order to avoid the risk of being in confrontation with the bureaucrats; partly because they perceive the Muslims as the greatest threat and therefore they like to collaborate with the bureaucrats in order to counter this threat.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the Indonesian churches are “tamed” and domesticated by the government to the extent that they lose their prophetic voice and have become a mere rubber stamp for the ruling regime.<sup>10</sup> The central theme in the relationship between the church and society has become the matter of how the church can maintain a good relationship with the government.<sup>11</sup> Instead of advocating and defending the oppressed, the Indonesian churches are busy seeking blessing from the government.<sup>12</sup> Instead of submitting themselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they have become subject only to their own interest for safety and comfort. No wonder that it is the government who has finally become the “lord” of the churches, rather than Jesus Christ. The churches are afraid to speak the truth according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The churches have successfully been convinced that their existence depends on the blessing from the public officers, not from Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

*Paulus Widjaja, a graduate of Fuller Seminary, is a Mennonite theologian and pastor. He is the director of the Peace Centre at the Duta Wacana Christian University in Jakarta, Indonesia. He also serves as secretary of the Mennonite World Conference’s Peace Council.*

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<sup>8</sup> The Board of Directors of Yakoma, Foreword to Victor Silaen, ed. *Gereja dan Reformasi: Pembaruan Gereja Menuju Indonesia Baru* (The Church and Reformation: Church Renewal Toward New Indonesia), (Jakarta: Yakoma PGI, 1999) viii; Victor Silaen, ed. *Introduction to Gereja dan Reformasi*, xii-xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Eka Darmaputera, *Kehadiran Kristen di Indonesia (Sebuah Analisis dan Penilaian)* (Christian Presence in Indonesia - An Analysis and Evaluation), unpublished paper, photocopied (Jakarta, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Id., “Mengevaluasi Kehadiran Gereja di Tengah-tengah Tuntutan Reformasi—Anno 1999” (Evaluating the Presence of the Church Amid the Demands of Reformation), in Victor Silaen ed. *Gereja dan Reformasi*, 11-13; Victor Silaen, *Introduction*, xiii; Nababan, “Gereja Ikut Bersalah Atas Keadaan Negara Ini” (The Church Is Also Guilty of the Situation of This Country), in Victor Silaen, ed. *Gereja dan Reformasi*, 215-217.

<sup>11</sup> Darmaputera, “Mengevaluasi,” 13.

<sup>12</sup> The Board of Directors of Yakoma, Foreword, viii.

<sup>13</sup> A.A. Yewangoe, “Gereja di Era Reformasi,” (The Church in the Reformation Era), in Victor Silaen, ed. *Gereja dan Reformasi*, 28-29; “Partisipasi Kristen Dalam Era Baru” (Christian Participation in the New Era), *ibid.*, 163-164.

### 3. CASE STUDIES OF BROKENNESS AND HOPE – see earlier in this Unit

#### 4. RECOMMENDED BOOKS

The members of Issue Group 22 highly recommend the following books to Christian pastors, churches, practitioners, and institutions for further reflection on the challenges of Christian witness in a divided world:

- Cejka, Mary Ann and Thomas Bamat, eds. **Artisans of Peace: Grassroots Peacemaking Among Christian Communities**. Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.
- DeYoung, Curtiss and Michael Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim. **United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race**. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Gunton, Colin E., ed. **The Theology of Reconciliation**. London: T & T Clark Ltd, 2003.
- Habel, Norman C. **Reconciliation: Searching for Australia's Soul**. Sydney: HarperCollins, 1999.
- Helmick, Raymond G. and Rodney L. Peterson. **Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation**. Templeton Foundation Press, 2001.
- Jones, L. Gregory. **Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis**. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995.
- Lederach, John Paul. **Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies**. Washington, DC: United Institute for Peace, 1998.
- Marshall, Christopher D. **Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment**. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001. 0-8028-4797-8.
- Nurenberger, Klaus and John Tooke. **The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa**. Cape Town:Methodist Publishing House, 1988.
- Rice, Chris. **Grace Matters: A Memoir of Faith, Friendship, and Hope in the Heart of the South**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.
- Schreiter, Robert J. **Reconciliation, Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order**. Orbis Books & Boston Theological Institute, Feb. 1996.
- Tutu, Desmond. **No Future Without Forgiveness**. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
- Volf, Miroslav. **Exclusion & Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation**. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Yoder, Perry B. **Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace**. Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1987. *By an Old Testament scholar.*

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# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## *Unit 8*

### *The Church after Pentecost*



## Development Associates International

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# Unit 8 – The Church after Pentecost

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Distinguish the multi-ethnic purposes of God in the Book of Acts
- Illustrate the struggles in the ethnocentric church when it started to become non-Jewish culture
- Compare a multi-cultural leadership team in the Church at Antioch with the leadership team in your own workplace
- Evaluate a sermon focused on God's redemption for all peoples
- Describe the link between Holy-Spirit fullness and racial reconciliation

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### Introduction & Author Note

Growing up in the predominantly “white” world of the United States, I never gave much thought to the issue of “unity” in the church. To me, “unity” only meant that the people weren’t fighting with each other. I never considered the need for unity across cultures because my church, like many churches, was “homogeneous” – we were all pretty much the same. The idea of unity with Christians from other races, other ethnic backgrounds, other languages, or even other languages never crossed my mind. For us, God was a white-haired Ruler of Heaven, Jesus was a blond-haired, blue-eyed man who looked northern European, and the Holy Spirit pertained to issues like power or comfort or wisdom – but had little to do with relating to people from other cultures.

The Church as we read about it in the book of Acts is God story of the start of the church, a story designed to break down images like mine – maybe like yours too! The story in Acts moves us from “the God of Israel” to “the God of all nations.” The followers of Jesus up until this point were primarily from one culture and one language. In Acts, the church becomes multi-cultural and multi-lingual. Before the Holy Spirit comes, the disciples are thinking of the political overthrow of the Roman Empire; after the Holy Spirit comes, the Christians are reaching out to Roman leaders, prison guards, merchants and philosophers.

The book of Acts is so significant in helping us get God’s perspective on culture and ethnicity as it pertains to the Spirit-filled Christian community that we’ll spend the next two Units looking at accounts from this book.

### Background Preceding Acts

In John 17, Jesus prayed a prayer that laid a foundation for what would occur in the book of Acts after the Spirit was poured out. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed that his followers would be “one.” On two occasions, He linked this oneness to the spread of the Gospel to the whole world (John 17:21, 23).

### Think about it

Answer Box #1

*Read John 17 and study especially John 17:21 and 23. List three concrete ways that the church can demonstrate that it is “one.”*

*Pick one of the ways you listed. Write a few sentences describing how demonstrating “being one” in that way would or could affect non-Christians who encountered a united Christian community.*



learning

## The Church in Acts

In an earlier reading in the course, Dr. Andrew Walls introduced us to the tension in the church as both prisoner of culture and liberator of culture. Because God calls us out in our respective ethnic specificity, we come to Christ through what he calls the “indigenizing” principle. In short, God speaks my language. But then, as we are liberated from our cultural restraints and biases to see others as brothers and sisters, we encounter the “pilgrim” principle.<sup>1</sup> The Book of Acts shows us this movement of the church.

The Book of Acts could be the subject of an entire book about God’s affirmation of ethnicity and hatred of ethnocentrism. In the words of Ajith Fernando, one of the main purposes of the book of Acts was to convey the message of “breaking human barriers in Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Acts 2 and the coming of the Holy Spirit has been called the reversal of the Tower of Babel. God intervenes with languages again, only this time, rather than creating chaos and discontinuity with the “other,” the languages at Pentecost reflect a church that reaches out with unity in the midst of cultural and linguistic diversity. “In many ways the book of Acts is the story of how the Holy Spirit takes ethnocentric people, changes them and calls them to carry the gospel across every ethnic and cultural boundary.”<sup>3</sup>

Daniel Hays similarly summarizes the message of Acts as it relates to multi-cultural diversity:

*As a pattern of true discipleship, Luke reminds the Church today that the gospel demands that we forsake our inherited culturally driven racial prejudices, and accept all people, especially those different from us as integral parts of the Church. The demolishing of racial barriers within the Church is a task in which the Spirit leads us. I would also suggest that the inverse is true: flourishing racial prejudice within a church is probably indicative of the Spirit's absence.*<sup>4</sup>

## Pentecost

The Acts 1:8 commission to all the ends of the earth starts towards immediate fulfillment in Acts 2. Acts 2:5 records that there were people “from every nation under heaven.” Fernando writes: “We have already seen that Pentecost overcame the effects of Babel. We saw how when the disciples praised God, they did not do so in the Greek language, which most of the people knew. Instead, they praised God in the vernacular dialects of these people.”<sup>5</sup>

Consider the significance of the multiple languages:

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Walls, *“Christianity as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture”* The Cross-Cultural Process in Missions History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), pp. 3-15.

<sup>2</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary - Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> J. Daniel Hays. *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary – Acts*, p. 30.

*On the Day of Pentecost, people realized, “God speaks my language! God knows my identity. God knows who I am.” In other words, my ethnic identity is recognized and valued by God... This security [that God knows & accepts my ethnic identity] allows us to go out into a world that is being fragmented by nationalism, racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, individualism and materialism and proclaim that there is a better way. As representatives of the kingdom of God made up of people from every tribe, ethnic group, and nationality we are called to demonstrate the power of the gospel to reconcile diverse people into one new humanity.<sup>6</sup>*

Pentecost set the tone for the diverse Body of Christ: “the Pentecostal tongues were a pointer to the way in which the Holy Spirit was going to break down social barriers and create an unprecedented kind of internationalism. Unlike the imperialisms of men, the Spirit had no ambition to homogenize the peoples of the world into a uniform Christian culture.”<sup>7</sup>

The Pentecost experience not only describes the church Christ desires; it also connects the event historically to the Old Testament and futuristically to the vision of Revelation.

John Stott writes, “Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly than [Pentecost] the multiracial, multinational, multilingual nature of the kingdom of Christ... This event not only connects back to Genesis 10 - 12 but points forward to the scene depicted in Revelation 7:9, where the redeemed will come from every nation, tribe, people, and language.”<sup>8</sup>

## Think about it

Answer Box # 2

Examine the makeup of your own church or Christian organization. How much cultural or ethnic diversity is reflected in the constituency?



learning

<sup>6</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson The Heart of Racial Justice, pp. 38-39.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Clements. The Church That Turned the World Upside Down (Cambridge, England: Crossway, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> John Stott. The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1990), p. 68.

## Acts 7 and the Sermon of Stephen

Within the first few chapters of the book of Acts, persecution starts increasing against the Christians. The persecution comes largely from the hands of the Jewish religious leaders. Perhaps they saw this new Gospel message for what it really was – a message of God’s love for all the peoples on earth. The Christian Gospel meant that they would lose the ethnic-specific hold that they maintained on their faith.

By Acts chapter 7, the persecution had escalated and Stephen becomes the first martyr. His sermon, however, was used by God to launch the church even further into the multiple cultures of the Roman Empire. Stephen’s pre-death sermon links to the expansion of the church in three ways. First, the sermon provokes a persecution of Christians that will force the Jerusalem believers to decentralize and launch out into Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1) and accelerate them towards the fulfillment of the Acts 1:8 mandate.

Second, the sermon broke down the ethnocentric barriers associated with historical Judaism. Stephen’s explosive sermon made Judaism a universal faith. For the first time, “anyone could come to God and be fully related to him without adopting an ethnocentric, Palestinian form of religion.”<sup>9</sup>

Finally, this sermon gets preached to the Pharisee Saul (later Paul), planting the seed of the universal message of God in a man who will become the apostle to the Gentiles.

## An Ethno-Centric Church?

The Jewish leadership of the church did not accept this ethnic diversity with open arms. The Old Testament Jewish self-view of being the “elect” carried over into the church in Acts. They needed persecution to disperse them (Acts 8:1). The Jerusalem church was too comfortable and too mono-cultural, even to the point of dealing uncomfortably with the convert Saul, trying to send him out to Tarsus (Acts 11). Acts 11:19 reminds us that ethnocentrism prevailed – even during persecution. Even after they were scattered, most insisted on preaching only to Jews.

Many of the Jewish converts to Christ persisted in evangelizing only their kind, but some started getting God’s message – that this Messiah was for all peoples. These preached to “outsiders” (Acts 11:20), and as a result, the Antioch church was planted.

This anonymous group of preachers in Acts 11 produced a change in mentality towards those who had previously been “Others.” Inviting Gentiles to the faith planted a multi-cultural seed in the church at Antioch so that it was an inclusive church from its beginning. “From now on there was no ‘one special group’ who alone had the right to hear the Gospel. The church had a debt to every group now. It was ‘open season’ on the whole world for the Gospel.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thom and Marcia Hople. Reaching the World Next Door, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> Ross Paterson. The Antioch Factor: the Hidden Message of the Book of Acts (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 2000), p. 92.

## Think about it

Answer Box # 3

*If your church or organization is dominated by one culture or ethnicity, what problems might you encounter if you started encouraging greater diversity?*



**learning**

### The Antioch Church – Acts 13

As a result of this multi-cultural start-up (and in contrast to the church in Jerusalem), the Antioch church was healthy, outward-looking and committed to taking the Gospel to all peoples. At the foundation of the Antioch church (Acts 13) were dispersed Jews: men from Cyprus and Cyrene according to Acts 11:20. Perhaps these men had more experience in the Gentile world and as a result, they had a bigger world view than their brothers based in Jerusalem. As a result, they reached out to Gentiles (the Hellenists), unlike their associates who spoke only to Jews.

Multi-ethnic outreach at the beginning of the Antioch church teaches us an important principle: churches being planted in multi-cultural settings will flourish better if they are planted by multi-ethnic church planting teams. The diverse foundation of the church in Antioch included a multi-cultural, diverse leadership team that included a Cyrenian, an African, and others from various strata of society.

Consider the ethnic diversity of the leadership team:

*“The list of prophets and teachers (13:1) symbolized the ethnic and cultural diversity of Antioch, a city with a cosmopolitan population:*

*Barnabas is mentioned first, possibly because he was the leader of the group. He was a Jew from the Jerusalem church but was originally from Cyprus (4:36), an island west of Palestine. Simeon is a Jewish name, but he is called Niger, meaning black. Attempts to identify him with Simon of Cyrene have not been convincing. Bruce suggests that Niger was a ‘descriptive addition, given to him perhaps because he was an African.’*



*Lucius was from Cyrene, which was in North Africa (present-day Libya). Some have suggested that this is Luke, but that is unlikely. Manaen is a Jewish name. The NIV translates syntrophos as ‘had been brought up with’ Herod the tetrarch, but it means foster brother or close friend from childhood. Bruce says that this title ‘was given to boys of the same age as royal princes who were taken to the royal court to be brought up with them.’ How strange – that Herod should end up beheading John the Baptist and being involved in the trial of Christ, while Manaen became a leader of the church. Saul, an educated Jew originally from Tarsus, is mentioned last.”<sup>11</sup>*

Daniel Hays, whose concern is largely to show the inclusions of Africans in the New Testament, concentrates on the leadership role of Simeon, called Niger. “*In Acts 13... a Black African is now cited as one four leaders in the new, burgeoning Church in Antioch. So Luke shows clearly that not only is the gospel to go to all peoples, including Black Africans, but also that all people, including Black Africans, are to be integrally included into the Church, the new people of God.*”<sup>12</sup>

A diverse church with diverse leadership became the pre-eminent missionary-sending church in the book of Acts. The Antioch fellowship becomes the church that sends the cross-cultural missionary team of Barnabas and Saul, who launch the church into the Gentile world.

## Think about it

### Answer Box # 4

*A pastor from one of the minority cultures in the United States told the leadership of a predominantly white, European descended church, “The church will never encourage diversity until the leadership is diverse and multi-cultural.” Do you agree? Why is the cultural and ethnic makeup of the leadership so important?*



## learning

<sup>11</sup> Ajith Fernando, The NIV Application Commentary – Acts, pp. 373-374.

<sup>12</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 178.

## Acts 15

In response to the ethnic expansion of the Gospel and the church to the Gentiles, the church leader James makes a revolutionary statement: “God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.” Fernando expands the words in this observation to highlight the globally expanding vision of the church. He writes:

In the Greek version of the Old Testament (the “Septuagint”) the ‘nations’ or ‘Gentiles’ (*ethne*) stand in contrast to ‘the people’ (*laos*), which usually refers to the Jews. Deuteronomy 14:2 says, for example, ‘You are a people [*laos*] holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples [*ethne*, nations] on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession.’ In other words, the Israelites have been called out from the nations to be a people for the Lord God. [In Acts 15], James says the opposite: **From within the nations God has taken a people for himself.**<sup>13</sup>

## Think about it

### Answer Box # 5

*William Seymour was a key leader in the Azusa Street Revivals of 1906, the revivals that launched the modern Pentecostal movement. Many are surprised when they read that Seymour taught that the first sign of the Holy Spirit’s fullness was **not** speaking in tongues. Instead, he insisted that the first sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit was racial reconciliation. He believed that a person transformed by the Holy Spirit would start to see others – even those who were culturally, ethnically, or economically different – with the eyes of Christ.*

*Do you agree that the first or more powerful sign of the Holy Spirit’s fullness is racial reconciliation? Why or why not?*



## learning

## Acts 17

Acts 17 and Paul’s Sermon on Mars Hill continues to expand a theme in Acts – namely preaching the Gospel to everyone and not just the Jews. John Stott focuses on this passage to present a biblical vision for a multi-racial society. He observes Paul’s four affirmations in Acts 17:22-31:Stott writes:<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary – Acts*, pp. 417-418.

<sup>14</sup> John Stott. *Involvement: Volume II: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1985).

*First, he proclaimed the unity of the human race, or the God of creation. Being equally created by him and like him, we are equal in his sight in worth and dignity, and therefore have an equal right to respect and justice.<sup>15</sup>*

*Secondly, Paul proclaimed the diversity of ethnic cultures, or the God of history. We must assert both the unity of the human race and the diversity of ethnic cultures simultaneously.<sup>16</sup>*

*Thirdly, Paul proclaimed the finality of Jesus Christ, or the God of Revelation. We learn, then, that a respectful acceptance of the diversity of cultures does not imply an equal acceptance of the diversity of religions.<sup>17</sup>*

*Fourthly, Paul proclaimed the glory of the Christian Church, or the God of Redemption.<sup>18</sup>*

Stott's point is this: the Christian community (including the church and Christian-led organizations) must exhibit its multiracial, multinational, and multicultural nature. The point of Acts 17 is in marked contrast to the so-called "Homogeneous Unit Principle." This idea taught that the church will grow fastest if it's made up of one specific culture or ethnicity. If the church is "homogeneous", people from that culture will feel comfortable when they come because they'll say, these our "our kind of people."

## Think about it

Answer Box #6

Can you think of a situation where a church would or should be culturally all the same – homogeneous? Describe.



**learning**

The book of Acts counteracts this idea. From reading the descriptions of the developing Christian community in Acts, one wonders whether a local church could or should ever be culturally homogeneous. You'll read about this later as you look through the report of a consultation on this issue. They summarized their findings this way:

All of us are agreed that in many situations a homogeneous unit church can be a legitimate and authentic church. Yet we are also agreed that it can never be complete in itself. Indeed, if it remains in isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ. Nor can it grow to maturity. Therefore, every homogeneous unit

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 90

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 92

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 93

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

church must take active steps to broaden its fellowship in order to demonstrate visibly the unity and the variety of Christ's Church,<sup>19</sup>

**Action steps to becoming a healthy intercultural church:**

Leaders from the church in Canada, where many churches are struggling to be more representative of the communities in which they serve, suggest seven aspects of developing greater unity in diversity:

- Gain self-understanding
- Understand causes of cultural clashes
- Accept cultural difference
- Commit to change of attitude
- Intentionally build relationships
- Recognize power issues
- Find out what is truly Biblical

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 7

*Describe a conflict of cultural values that you have experienced, or seen, in your church. Was the conflict resolved? If so, what made the resolution possible? If not, why not? What impact did this conflict have on the church?*



**learning**

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 94, quoting from “The Pasadena Report,” (Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 1, 1977,) p. 6 – which you’ll be reading at the conclusion of this unit.

## Final Assignment



**application**

Final Assignment

1) Read the Lausanne paper on the “Homogenous Unit Principle” that follows. Write a 1-page reflection on your agreements and/or disagreements to this discussion.

2) Is yours a “homogenous unit church”? Work with your leadership team to determine if your church should be more intentional about becoming culturally or ethnically diverse.

If you agree that you need to move towards greater diversity, then agree together on three practical steps you can take towards that goal. Summarize in 1-page the steps you’re going to take as well as the discussion that led to these action steps.

## Readings

### Pasadena Consultation - Homogeneous Unit Principle



**reading**

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## 1. Introduction: The Setting

A discussion of the "homogeneous unit principle" of Church Growth theory was held under the auspices of the Lausanne Theology and Education Group from May 31 to June 2, 1977, in Pasadena, California. Five faculty members of the Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission had prepared advance papers on the methodological, anthropological, historical, ethical, and theological implications of the homogeneous unit principle (HUP). Five discussants had prepared papers in response to these. The ten of us then debated the issues raised, with the help of about 25 consultants. We are grateful to Fuller Seminary for their generous hospitality.

This consultation was the first to be held under Lausanne's sponsorship since the International Congress on World Evangelization took place in July 1974. We desire to express our heartfelt thanks to God that the so called "spirit of Lausanne" has characterized our conversation, in that we have been able to discuss controversial issues face-to-face with openness, honesty, and love.

We have found ourselves to be entirely united in our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme authority of the Bible, and the task of worldwide evangelization. We have not polarized into two groups who are respectively "for" and "against" the HUP or HU churches. Our discussion has been much more subtle than that. We have striven to listen to each other and to understand not only each other's arguments but the concerns which lie behind the arguments. And we bear witness to the help which God has given us.

Now we desire to make public both the substantial areas of agreement which we have discovered and the points of tension and disagreement which still remain. We earnestly hope that the former will contribute to the spread of the gospel, and that the latter will stimulate us all to further study and discussion.

## 2. Definition of Terms

Dr. Donald McGavran's definition of a HU is "a section of society in which all members have some characteristic in common." Used in this way, the term is broad and elastic. To be more precise, the common bond may be geographical, ethnic, linguistic, social, educational, vocational, or economic, or a combination of several of these and other factors. Whether or not members of the group can readily articulate it, the common characteristic makes them feel at home with each other and aware of their identity as "we" in distinction to "they."

We are agreed that everybody belongs to at least one such homogeneous unit. This is an observable fact which all of us recognize. Not all of us, however, consider that it is the best term to use. Some of us prefer "subculture," while others of us would like to explore further the biblical concept of *ethnos* (usually translated "nation" or "people") as enjoying a "solidarity in covenant" by creation, although in rebellion against its Creator. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this statement we shall retain the more familiar expression "homogeneous unit."

### 3. The Homogeneous Unit Principle and Evangelism

What we have been specially concerned to discuss is the relation of HUs to the evangelistic task laid upon the Church by the Great Commission of our Lord, and the propriety of using them as a means to world evangelization. Dr. McGavran's well-known statement is that people "like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers." That is, the barriers to the acceptance of the gospel are often more sociological than theological; people reject the gospel not because they think it is false but because it strikes them as alien. They imagine that in order to become Christians they must renounce their own culture, lose their own identity, and betray their own people.

Therefore, in order to reach them, not only should the evangelist be able to identify with them, and they with the evangelist; not only must the gospel be contextualized in such a way that it communicates with them; but the church into which they are invited must itself belong to their culture sufficiently for them to feel at home in it. It is when these conditions are fulfilled that men and women are won to Jesus Christ, and subsequently that churches grow.

### 4. The Riches of Cultural Diversity

The arguments advanced to support the concept of the importance of culture are not only pragmatic ("churches grow fastest that way") but biblical ("God desires it that way"). We leave aside for the moment the question whether the best way to express the diversity of human cultures is to encourage a diversity of homogeneous unit churches. At this point we are unanimous in celebrating the colorful mosaic of the human race that God has created. This rich variety should be preserved, not destroyed, by the gospel. The attempt to impose another culture on people who have their own is cultural imperialism. The attempt to level all cultures into a colorless uniformity is a denial of the Creator and an affront to his creation. The preservation of cultural diversity honors God, respects man, enriches life, and promotes evangelization. Each church, if it is to be truly indigenous, should be rooted in the soil of its local culture.

### 5. The Church, the Churches and the Homogeneous Unit Principle

We are all agreed that, as there is one God and Father, one Lord Jesus and one Holy Spirit, so he has only one church. The unity of the church is a given fact (Ephesians 4:4-6). At the same time, we have the responsibility to maintain this unity (v. 3), to make it visible, and to grow up into the fullness of unity in Christ (vv. 13-16).

How then can the unity of the church (to which we are committed) and the diversity of cultures (to which we are also committed) be reconciled with one another? More particularly, how can separate HU churches express the unity of the Body of Christ?

We are all agreed that the dividing wall, which Jesus Christ abolished by his death, was *echthra*, "enmity" or "hostility." All forms of hatred, scorn, and disrespect between Christians of different backgrounds are forbidden, being totally incompatible with Christ's reconciling work. But we must go further than this. The wall dividing Jew from Gentile was not only their active reciprocal hatred; it was also their racial and religious alienation symbolized by "the law of commandments and ordinances." This, too, Jesus abolished, in order to "create in himself one new man in place of two, so making peace" (Eph. 2:15).

This did not mean that Jews ceased to be Jews, or Gentiles to be Gentiles. It did mean, however, that their racial differences were no barrier to their fellowship, for through their union with Jesus Christ both groups were now "joint heirs, joint members of the same body and joint partakers of the promise" (Eph. 3:6 literally). The union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ was the "mystery" which was revealed to Paul and which he proclaimed to all (Ephesians 3:3-6, 9, 10). Thus the church as the single new humanity or God's new society is central to the gospel. Our responsibility is both to preach it and to exhibit it before the watching world.

What did this mean in practice in the early church? It seems probable that, although there were mixed Jewish-Gentile congregations, there were also homogeneous Jewish congregations (who still observed Jewish customs) and homogeneous Gentile congregations (who observed no Jewish customs). Nevertheless, Paul clearly taught them that they belonged to each other in Christ, that they must welcome one another as Christ had welcomed them (compare Romans 15:7), and that they must respect one another's consciences, and not offend one another. He publicly rebuked Peter in Antioch for withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentile believers, and argued that his action was a denial of the truth of the gospel, that is, of the justification of all believers (whether Jews or Gentiles) by grace through faith (compare Galatians 2:11-16). This incident and teaching should be taken as a warning to all of us of the seriousness of permitting any kind of apartheid in the Christian fellowship. And it should go without saying that no one visiting a church or requesting membership in it should ever be turned away on merely cultural grounds. On the contrary, visitors and members should be welcomed from all cultures.

All of us are agreed that in many situations a homogeneous unit church can be a legitimate and authentic church. Yet we are also agreed that it can never be complete in itself. Indeed, if it remains in isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ. Nor can it grow into maturity. Therefore, every HU church must take active steps to broaden its fellowship in order to demonstrate visibly the unity and the variety of Christ's church. This will mean forging with other and different churches creative relationships which express the reality of Christian love, brotherhood, and interdependence.

During our consultation we have shared several possible ways of developing such relationships. They will range from occasional united evangelistic crusades, Christian concerts, conferences, conventions and annual festivals through a variety of voluntary associations and interchurch federations to the regular enjoying of intercultural fellowship. One model of this we have looked at is the large city church (or congregation) with several HU subchurches (or subcongregations) which normally worship separately but sometimes together. On these occasions their common celebration is enriched by the dress, music, and liturgy of different traditions. Another model a multicultural Sunday congregation which divides into mid-week HU house churches, while a third and more radical way is to work towards integration, although without cultural assimilation.

In our commitment to evangelism, we all understand the reasons why homogeneous unit churches usually grow faster than heterogeneous or multicultural ones. Some of us, however, do not agree that the rapidity with which churches grow is the only or even always the most important Christian priority. We know that an alien culture is a barrier to faith. But we also know that segregation and strife in the church are barriers to faith. If, then, we have to choose between apparent acquiescence in segregation for the sake of numerical church growth and the struggle for reconciliation at the expense of numerical church growth, we find ourselves in a painful dilemma. Some of us have had personal experience of the evils of tribalism in Africa, racism in America, caste in India, and economic injustice in Latin America and elsewhere, and all of us are opposed to these things. In such



situations none of us could with a good conscience continue to develop HU churches which seem to ignore the social problems and even tolerate them in the church, while some of us believe that the development of HU churches can often contribute to their solution.

We recognize that both positions can be defended in terms of obedience—obedience to Christ's commission to evangelize on the one hand, and obedience to the commands to live in love and justice on the other. The synthesis between these two still eludes us, although we all accept our Lord's own words that it is through the brotherly love and unity of Christians that the world will come to believe in him (John 13:35; 17:21, 23).

### **6. Culture, Evil and the Process of Change**

We have tried to consider carefully what our attitude to peoples' different cultures should be. At Lausanne we affirmed that "culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he has fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic." We do not forget the Scripture which declares that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (I John 5:19).

So some of us are more positive and others more negative towards culture. In our discussions, however, we have concentrated particularly on the negative or demonic elements in human culture. We recognize that in all human groupings there is a latent tendency either to claim from their members too high a loyalty (and so become idolatrous), or to shun outsiders (and so become self-centered).

Further, in some groups the common trait of homogeneity which binds them together is itself evil. This might, for example, be cannibalism, racism or (if we may cite opposite ends of the social scale) crime and prostitution in the slums or oppressive wealth in the suburbs. In such cases, what constitutes the homogeneous unit must be opposed rather than affirmed. The church should not be planted in it without making its opposition plain, nor without seeking to overcome the evil principle and/or uncover and change its underlying causes. The church should never avoid this prophetic and social ministry. Belonging to Jesus Christ involves enmity with the world.

We have found considerable help in the concept of change. To acknowledge the fact of HUs is not to acquiesce in the characteristics they possess which are displeasing to Christ. The Christian attitude to HUs is often called the "realist attitude," because it realistically accepts that HUs exist and will always exist. We would prefer, however, to call this an attitude of "dynamic realism" because we wish also to affirm that HUs can change and must always change. For Christ the Lord gives to his people new standards. They also receive a new homogeneity, which transcends all others, for now they find their essential unity in Christ, rather than in culture.

Not that change can be taken for granted, for it does not always happen automatically. It needs to be actively sought, beginning with the first acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord, and then steadily growing through a process of continuous reevaluation according to Scripture. When this happens sometimes a HU church replaces its principle of cohesion with another and better one, while at other times it disbands altogether, its members gravitating to other churches.

### **7. The Lordship of Christ and Repentance**

In connection with the concept of "people movements" the distinction has been drawn between "discipling" (becoming a Christian and being baptized) and "perfecting" (the process of growth into maturity). We have had a full discussion of the issues which this distinction raises, and in particular whether it involves some kind of "postponement of ethical awareness" in inquirers, and what form or degree of repentance is implicit in conversion and baptism. Here we have thankfully discovered a wide area of agreement.

We agree that to preach the gospel is to proclaim Jesus Christ in the fullness of his person and work; that this is to "preach the Kingdom" which embraces both the total salvation and the total submission implicit in the gracious rule of God; and that it is always wrong to preach Jesus as Saviour without presenting him also as Lord, since it is precisely because he is the supreme Lord exalted to the Father's right hand that he has the authority to bestow salvation and the power to rescue sinners from sin, fear, evil, the thralldom of spirits, and death. We agree that in what has been called "lordship evangelism" we must not isolate from one another the separate parts of Christ's commission namely to "make disciples," to "baptize," and to "teach;" that the Christian nurture of converts is indispensable because Christian growth is not automatic; and that daily repentance and daily obedience are necessary parts of Christian discipleship. We agree that the call to repentance must always be faithfully sounded; that there can be no repentance without ethical content; and that the precise ethical issues will vary according to each situation and HU. We also agree that the evangelist must pay attention to a community's or individual's sense of guilt, although, because this is not always a reliable guide, he must also draw attention to sins which the Bible clearly condemns; and that no evangelist has the right to conceal either the offense (*skandalon*) of the gospel which is Jesus Christ and his cross, or any ethical implication of the gospel which is relevant to the particular situation in which he is preaching it.

At the same time, we recognize the dangers to which any unbalance in these matters would expose us. If we underemphasize repentance, we offer sinners what Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace," but if we overemphasize it we may be preaching the law rather than the gospel, a code rather than Christ, and salvation by works rather than by grace through faith. Secondly, if we do nothing to identify what is meant by "sin," we are asking for repentance in a vacuum, which is an impossibility, whereas if we become too specific in naming sins, we either try to do the Holy Spirit's convicting work for him or we may forget the complex cultural factors (e.g., in the case of polygamy) which should make us tentative in our teaching rather than dogmatic. Thirdly, it is possible to imply that conversion involves no radical change, while it is equally possible to expect too much of inquirers and new converts. Perfection is indeed the goal to be set before them, but we must not require maturity of understanding or behavior from a newborn babe in Christ.

### **8. Conclusion: Our Eschatological Hope**

The vision of the end which God has given us in Scripture contains several references to the nations. We are allowed to glimpse "a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues" standing before God's throne and celebrating his salvation (Rev. 7:9, 10). We also see the new Jerusalem which will be enriched by the "glory and honor of the nations" and whose tree of life will be "for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 21:26; 22:2). These biblical phrases seem to us to warrant the conviction that heaven will be adorned by the best products of God-given human creativity, that

heavenly fellowship will be harmonious and heterogeneous, and that the diversity of languages and cultures will not inhibit but rather ennoble the fellowship of the redeemed.

Now the church is an eschatological community. Already it is the new society of the new age. Already it has tasted the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5). Already it has received the great promise for the end-time the Holy Spirit himself (Acts 2:17). Therefore it is called to anticipate on earth the life of heaven, and thus to develop both cultural richness and heterogeneous fellowship.

In particular, we should seek to express and experience these things at the Lord's Supper, which God intends to be a foretaste of the Messianic banquet in his Kingdom, which Jesus has promised to grace with his presence, and from which he sends us back into the world as his servants and his witnesses.

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# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## Unit 9

### *The Church for ALL Peoples*



## Development Associates International

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# Unit 9 – The Church for ALL Peoples

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Explain God’s plan for an ethnically diverse Body
- Demonstrate how every believer brings his or her unique culture and diverse traits and traditions to the fellowship
- Examine the barriers that must be overcome to reach this goal
- Identify 9 principles from Acts for breaking down walls between culturally diverse peoples

### Additional Reading for this unit from the textbook:

**“Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility”, Chapters 8 and 9 (pp. 100-124)**



## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### ***Introduction Author's Note***

I never realized how ethnocentric I was until I started really encountering people from other cultures. I had grown up in a relatively mono-cultural setting, I had little cross-cultural experience to compare myself against. In spite of my narrowness of cultural experiences, I was always interested in God's work around the world. I prayed for Hindus, fasted for Moslems, and enjoyed hearing Christians from other cultures worship in other languages as I attended conferences on missions.

All of these experiences, however, kept people of other cultures or ethnicities at a distance. Then I started actually encountering people from other cultures. For the first time, I started sharing meals, living in the same community, and trying to create a church that was truly multi-cultural. And *here's what I learned: **there's a huge difference between loving people of other cultures in theory with sharing my life with them in reality.***

Moving from theory to reality is what dominates the lessons from the book of Acts that we'll examine in this Unit. Even though the predominantly Hebrew-culture early Christians would all have agreed with John 3:16 – that God so loved **“the world”** – but sharing meals with Gentiles and welcoming Samaritans into the fellowship was outside of their cultural boundaries. In the stories we'll examine in this unit, God forces the Christians to encounter the multi-cultural nature of His design for the church. And they learn that accepting the thought that the Church was for “all peoples” was easy in theory. But to build a multi-cultural community of faith was another matter.

### ***Two cross-cultural encounters in the Book of Acts***

The experience of Pentecost and the guidance of God throughout the book of Acts reaffirms His plan for an ethnically diverse yet united church, but the most powerful examples are when face to face interchanges actually take place. Philip's encounters in Acts 8, first with the Samaritans and then with the Ethiopian provide our first picture of a Jewish believer whose view of others had been transformed. Peter's encounter in Acts 10, first with God and then with Cornelius and his Gentile household, provides the second picture.

### **Philip in Acts 8: to Samaritans and then on to Ethiopia**

As mentioned in an earlier Unit, the persecution of the church forcibly launched them out towards the ethnic and geographic destinations of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The introductory verse in Acts 8:1 mentions the first three: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The latter group is where Philip's witness begins, but it does not stop in Samaria. Philip's outreach to the

Samaritans is followed by the conversion of the first Black African, the Ethiopian eunuch.<sup>1</sup> One scholar cites several ancient Greek sources and from these theorizes that Ethiopia (Cush) to the people in the Book of Acts represented 'the ends of the earth', and thus the conversion of the eunuch foreshadows the complete fulfillment of Jesus' mandate in Acts 1:8.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Acts 8 in its complete form represents symbols of the Gospel's anticipated spread to the ends of the earth.

Daniel Hays, whose emphasis is on the inclusion of Africans in the plan of God, takes the implications of the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian even further, noting the chronological conversion of an African before the Gentile Cornelius:

...this Black African believed, was baptized, and returned home before the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10, who symbolizes the Roman world. The Ethiopian eunuch was also converted several years before Paul received his Macedonian call to take the gospel onto European soil. [The conversion of the Ethiopian] marked an even more radical stage in the rise of the Gentile mission than Peter's visit to Caesarea. It is in any event of interest to note the first converted "foreigner" in Acts was an African, and one could say that the mission began there [in Africa], long before Paul ever took it to European soil.<sup>3</sup>

This historical fact is very significant for understanding the African presence in the global church, hinted at in the titles of Bediako's book, *Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*<sup>4</sup> and Sanneh's book, *Whose Religion is Christianity?*<sup>5</sup>

Philip in Acts 8 also underscores the role and power of the Holy Spirit to transform ethnocentric worldviews, a critical theme in Luke-Acts. We think of it as crossing into geographically close, similar culture. But Philip's view of his own ethnicity and the ethnicity of the "other" had been radically transformed by the unifying work of the Holy Spirit. He became a Spirit-empowered witness to ethnically different people Israelites had been taught to hate for generations:

Readers today tend to gloss over the magnitude of Philip's work in Samaria, for we usually forget how much mutual animosity existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. Sociologically and missiologically, Philip's action was extremely profound, for he was able to put aside the generations of prejudice and hate that were an integral part of his own culture. The power of the Spirit in Philip's Samaritan mission was probably not limited to the working of miraculous signs (Acts 8:67), but was also actively involved in changing Philip's worldview and his inherited attitude toward the Samaritans. Likewise, if we Christians today are to have any hope of obeying the biblical command to form a unified people of God out of diverse ethnicities, we too must acknowledge and follow the critical leading and empowering of the Spirit."<sup>6</sup>

## Think about it

<sup>1</sup> J. Daniel Hays. *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003) points out that the word *Aithiopia* in Greek translates literally 'burnt faces' – indicating that they were clearly people of different colored skin, pp. 34-39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Daniel Hays citing Benjamin Witherington's research, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 175-176.

<sup>4</sup> Kwame Bediako. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Lamin Sanneh. *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> J. Daniel Hays. *From Every People and Nation*, p. 164.

## Answer Box # 1

*Are there any people groups that your group might view in the same way that Jews looked at Samaritans? How would you feel if God suddenly transported you into the midst of these people and told you to be his witness?*



## learning

**Peter in Acts 10: encounter with the Gentiles**

The account of Peter's preaching to and praying with Cornelius is quite different than the story of Philip to the Samaritans and the African. Philip goes willingly; Peter strongly resists. But the detailed story of Peter with Cornelius represents a dramatic turning point in opening the Jewish-dominated church to becoming the church for all peoples. Cornelius represents the Roman world in specific but the Gentile world in general.

The story represents the full invitation of the Gentiles into the Church, but it also represents the Spirit-driven transformation that had to occur in ethnocentric Peter. Peter, like Jonah towards the Ninevites, had no worldview of Gentiles that desired to include them in the merciful plan of God. They were unclean and, as far as Peter was concerned, still relegated to the "outer courts"<sup>7</sup> of the action of God.

But Acts 10 is the story of two conversions. Will Willimon asks, "Is this the story of the conversion of a Gentile or the conversion of an apostle?" He answers, "Both Peter and Cornelius needed changing if God's mission is to go forward."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Meredith McGuire builds on this idea, defining conversion as a transformational process on how one views oneself as well as the larger world:

<sup>7</sup> In Peter's time, even God-fearing Gentiles were excluded from the inner chambers of worship; they could come to the outer courts, but they saw themselves as "second-class" citizens in the plan of the God of Israel.

<sup>8</sup> Will Willimon. *Acts*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 96.

Conversion means a transformation of one's *self* concurrent with a transformation of one's basic *meaning system*. It changes the sense of who one is and how one belongs in the social situation. Conversion transforms the way the individual perceives the rest of society and his or her personal place in it, altering one's view of the world.<sup>9</sup>

The point of this extraordinary encounter in Acts 10 is that the salvation God offers is to all humans everywhere, regardless of racial background or characteristics. Peter had to learn that "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is-right" (NIV). "Racial hatred or discrimination is impossible when one sees people the way God does."<sup>10</sup>

Acts 10, therefore, is a key turning point of the church towards those outside the normal ethnic sphere: The fulfillment of the mission of the Church thus requires that the Church itself be changed and learn new things. Very clearly the Church had to learn something new as a result of the conversion of Cornelius and his household. And, once again, the point must be made: this is not an achievement of the Church but a work of the Spirit. In that story we see Peter's extreme reluctance to mix with the household of a pagan Roman officer. He tells the story of Jesus in that Roman house because he is directly questioned. The fruit of the telling is an action of the Spirit that takes matters out of Peter's hands. He can only confess with astonishment that these uncircumcised pagans have been made part of God's household. So the Church is moved one step on the road toward becoming a home for people of all nations and a sign of the unity of all.<sup>11</sup>

The story of Peter with Cornelius points out the weakness of the highly individualized way that we represent conversion:

Most evangelicals view their faith, conversion, and transformation as an individual matter that affects society one life at a time. Unfortunately, this theological individualism has rendered most evangelical Christians completely ill-equipped to deal with major social structures or grapple with corporate and institutional evil.<sup>12</sup>

These authors, McNeil and Richardson, continue: "Our individualistic gospel has left the powers of racism and ethnocentrism unaffected."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, (Boston: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> James P. Eckman, "The Ethics of Race", *Christian Ethics in a Postmodern World* (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Training Association, 1999), p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> Lesslie Newbegin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

**Think about it?**

Answer Box # 2

*Stop and read the story of two conversions in Acts 10. Which “conversion” is more dramatic in this story? Cornelius and his household? Or Peter’s understanding that the Gospel is for the Gentiles too – even if they do not follow Jewish cultural traditions? Explain your answer.*

**learning****Acts 10 as a case study of transformed identity**

The story of Peter with Cornelius provokes an obvious question. How does God change a person’s worldview?

God was always at work changing his people to give them a wider view of himself and the world into which he sent them. He worked over the Israelites incessantly trying to get them to understand that he was the God of all nations and that they were to be his “light of revelation to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6). The Psalmist referred frequently to “all nations,” “all peoples” and “all the earth,” but the people of God just didn’t get it. They turned inward and insular. They ran as racists – like Jonah – not wanting their pagan enemies to have a chance to respond to God’s mercy.

By the New Testament, the people of God were an inward-looking, ethnocentric, defensive minority. During his ministry, Jesus broke stereotypes with the healing of Gentiles and conversations with Samaritans, but even by the time of the Resurrection, they still didn’t get it. They were still looking for political takeover (Acts 1:6), and when Jesus commissioned them to “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth,” (1:8), they had no idea what to do. They retreated to a room and prayed. Even after the Holy Spirit came in power, they stayed primarily in Jerusalem and ministered primarily to Jews.

In this context we find God at work changing the worldview of Peter and the New Testament church towards the Gentiles. The Samaritans had already come to faith (Acts 8), but now the real pagans were going to get included. Acts 10 gives a number of concrete examples from which we can learn how God works to transform our view of others in order to enlarge the peoples and cultures of the church.

## Nine principles out of Acts 10

**Principle #1: Prayerful Preparation.** God is a work to prepare people on the receiving end (10:1-8). Cornelius was living with the disciplines that put himself in the place to hear God: Luke describes him as devout, God-fearing, generous, prayerful, sensitive to God's presence (vision), and obedient. Similarly, God is preparing Peter on the sending end (10:9). God intervenes with visions, reminding us that transformation such as Peter's may require a miracle.

### Think about it?

Answer Box # 3

*What is the role of prayer in bringing diverse people together?*



learning

**Principle #2: confrontation (repeatedly) with stereotypes.** God confronts Cornelius (10:1-8) with a bold vision, refuting his stereotype that because he was a Gentile, he was considered inferior or second class to God. Cornelius had an “outer court” mentality and God was calling him close. On the other hand, Peter's stereotypes about his ways being “clean” and everything else being “unclean” get demolished in the dreams God sends. God whacks Peter's stereotypes (10:10-16) with three dreams which focused on Peter's stereotypes about God – namely that God was more concerned about ritual and legalities than about people.

It's worth noting the phrase “Peter fell into a trance” (10:10). He was out of control! Often God does his greatest teaching in our lives when we are no longer in control.

**Principle #3: both men had to step outside of their comfort-zones.** For Peter and Cornelius to change, they both had to step outside of their culturally defined comfort-zones. Peter had to go (10:23-24). Cornelius had to receive him (10:24). The Jewish men had to come in the house (10:23), something they had never done before. A transformed world-view for individuals, groups and churches means stepping into the risky spots! “We need to go into other cultures because in the ‘chaos’ we find ourselves in the positions of learning.”<sup>14</sup>

**Principle #4: First-hand encounter.** They met; they dined (10:48); and they listened to each others' stories. By the grace of God, they laid their stereotypes to the side and they met at a place of equality – the meal table. The shared table is a major

<sup>14</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, The Heart of Racial Justice, p. 137.

theme throughout Luke's writings – starting with the accusations that Jesus dined with sinners. How we eat together often reflects our ability to draw together across cultures. One leader described the leveling effect of eating together this way: “If you have dinner at my table, we're friends.”

### Think about it?

Answer Box # 4

*What is the significance of dining at the same table in your culture? Can you think of a race, culture, or class of people in your context with whom it would be a dramatic event if you invited them to share a meal with you?*



learning

**Principle #5: Humility and service.** Peter served his Gentile guests, a radical departure from stereotypes (10:23). His actions force those who perceive themselves as having power or the “upper hand” over a minority or looked-down-upon person to ask the question, are we going to serve or do we insist on being the prominent guests?

**Principle #6: Testimonies.** Peter tells his story of God transforming his cultural assumptions, a story that testified to the Gentiles that God was intervening on their behalf (10:27-29). Cornelius tells his story of God at work in their midst (10:30-33), and Peter cannot refute the common work of grace that he sees in their midst. Peter confirms in his own heart what he already knew to be true (10:34-43). In the reconciliation process, we need to listen to each other telling stories of God-at-work in our midst. It reminds us that the God of the universe is working in many cultures, but more importantly, it reminds us that we have a common Father, and therefore, we are brothers.

**Principle #7: getting God's perspective on the WORLD.** It took four visions (three for Peter) and a first-hand encounter, but Peter finally gets it (10:34-35). For him, he had heard phrases like “Lord of all” (10:36) and “everyone who believes in him” (10:43) before, but he probably heard them as “Lord of all Jews” or “everyone (*i.e.*, Jews) who believes”, but because of his meeting with Cornelius, the phrase takes on new meaning for Peter. Whenever we encounter some brother or sister from another culture, we need to ask, “what is God teaching us here about himself and about his love for the whole world?”

**Principle #8: let the Holy Spirit work.** When God works to bring unity out of diversity and healing out of conflict, get ready to be “astonished” (Acts 10:44-46). And when God surprises you, testify about and affirm God's work in your midst (10:47-48).

**Principle #9: Continue to live by grace.** The complete story of Peter reminds us that some change slowly. Peter was prepared to reach out to outsiders by walking with Jesus for 3+ years. And God intervenes here to change him dramatically through visions and a personal encounter with a believing Gentile. But a few years later, we find Peter backsliding into his ethnocentric ways again by refusing to eat with the Gentiles, an action that Paul the apostle rebuked openly (Galatians 2:11-21). People change slowly and some biases take years to change. Don't give up on people.

Our goal, imitating the experiences of Acts 10, is to create contexts where people can encounter each other and God to the point that their stereotypes are refuted and they understand that "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (10:34-35)

## Final Assignment



### Final Assignment

- 1) In the next two weeks, look for two fellow Christians who are culturally different from yourself and initiate a relationship by joining them for a meal in their particular context. Like Peter in Acts 10, take your child, spouse, friend or co-worker so that others can help you see, observe, and confirm the new vision God is giving you.
- 2) After this experience, join together to write up the lessons learned about the way that their culture influences how they understand God and how their perspective helps you see God's character in a new way.
- 3) Write a prayer of repentance for the mono-cultural church.



# **Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity**

## ***Unit 10***

### ***The Work of Christ: Forgiveness & Reconciliation***



## **Development Associates International**

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# Unit 10 – The Work of Christ: Forgiveness & Reconciliation

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Explain the horizontal nature of Christ’s redemptive work
- Appraise Ephesians 2:14 ff passage and the description it gives of the true nature of the Body of Christ.
- Evaluate in your own context what it will mean to express in relationships the fact that Jesus’ death on the cross breaks down the “dividing walls of hostility” between separated peoples”

### Additional Reading for this unit from the textbook:

“Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility”, Chapter 10 (pp. 125-137)

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### Introduction and Author Note

When I first became a Christian, I understood that Jesus' death on the Cross forgave my sins and now healed my relationship with God. For me, salvation was a vertical relationship – me the sinner now reconciled in his relationship with the Almighty God. I was forgiven, made new (II Corinthians 5:17), and now assured of a future in heaven. Even baptism – which in the New Testament times meant an intentional identification of a person with other believers in Christ – for me was largely an individualistic event.

Later study in the Scripture taught me some of the lessons that we'll be concentrating on in Units 10 and 11 – namely, that being “saved” is not just the repair of a vertical relationship with God but also the horizontal relationships we have with each other. When I decided to follow Jesus, every other follower of Jesus became my brother or sister. We are now family because we've been adopted by the same Father. As we'll see, the barriers that typically separated me from others or made me feel superior or inferior to others have been broken down.

You may not come from a culture that is as highly individualistic as mine, but have you ever considered the horizontal nature of Jesus' work on the Cross. Do you realize that when we are “in Christ”, there is no longer Brahmin or Dalit, superior tribe to inferior tribe, Jew or Gentile, poor or rich? In Christ, we are all equal members of the same family. Our supreme identity is now internal rather than external. As one person put it, “at the foot of the Cross, the ground is level.”

Like many of the biblical truths we have covered in this course, this idea of being reconciled both to Christ and to each other is easier to believe intellectually than it is to put into practice. That's why we start with the words of a Christian leader serving in a very tough situation – where the hurts of the past and the oppression of the present means overcoming many barriers between brothers and sisters from the opposing ethnicities.

### A Palestinian Reflection on Our Identity in Christ

Dr. Salim Munayer is a Palestinian. He lives in Israel, teaches in Palestine, and dedicates his life to “bridge-building” between separated peoples. He is founder and leader of *Musalaha* (which in Arabic means “reconciliation”), a ministry that works to foster relationships and build peace between Jews and Palestinians. He writes in his March 2006 newsletter:

Often in group relationships, there is a denial and rejection of the others identity. One group puts demands on the other to submit or to conform their identity. Aspects of culture, heritage and history are suppressed because they are uncomfortable or different. In this context, there is the added dimension that Israeli Messianic and Palestinian Christian believers are minorities in their communities, often feeling that they have to prove their loyalties to their people.

In facing the issues of identity, the forum for healing is community and reconciliation. While some may have the instinct to withdraw and separate, they must move past this withdrawal phase in order to progress in reconciliation. The wounds caused by identities in conflict will be healed and redeemed through relationship that is initiated by Christ's act of reconciliation on the cross.

Ephesians 2 confronts the hostility that exists in relationships, whether on inter-personal or inter-group level. In this act of reconciliation, Christ put to death our hostility and enmity, and he does so by bringing people together. We are dependent on

each other to end the hostility that is between our groups and within ourselves. There is solidarity in sinfulness and solidarity in redemption. Our identities are transformed in relationship and not in separation. When coming to the foot of the cross, we require each other in order to deal with the hostility in our hearts and to establish peace and bring healing.

The bad news of our crisis of identity and inherited pain can be overcome by the good news of a God who truly loves us and wants us to be whole. The message of reconciliation with God is that through Jesus Christ we can become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), at peace with God. Curtiss DeYoung, quoting pastoral counselor Gene Knudsen, writes, 'Healthy people are not destructive. They do not wound nor annihilate one another with guns or bombs. Healthy people are able to share; they are concerned for the well-being of others. They are grateful for life, and have compassion for others even their enemies.'

This process is evident in Ephesians 2:19-22, where Paul says in Christ we move from being in enmity into being members of the same household. We are no longer strangers and foreigners to each other, but fellow citizens and equal members in the household of God. The dramatic change in relationship brings familiarity, closeness and a new identity. We move from having a crisis of identity that denies and rejects the other, to a redeemed identity that embraces the other, and as such allows a dwelling place for the spirit of God.

### Think about it

Answer Box # 1

*Do you agree with the statement, "Our identities are transformed in relationship and not in separation?"  
What is the role of people living and worshipping together in community in the process of healing the wounds of ethnic hostility and cultural separation?*



**learning**

**Read Ephesians 2:14-22**

This passage is the focal point of our study in Units 10 and 11. Now that you are this far along in the course, read the passage as you've never read it before – as you think about the idea of being saved not only for vertical reconciliation with God but also for horizontal reconciliation with each other – even our past enemies. Read slowly the way that Eugene Peterson writes a few of these verses in his paraphrase The Message.

*Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.*

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 2

**To provoke your thinking:**

*If people in our past have hurt us deeply, should we forgive them even before they ask? How do we release our emotional hurt?*

**learning****Ephesians Study**

Paul's teaching on the nature of the church (ecclesiology), which will factor heavily into this and the next unit, teaches a unity in diversity which is based on the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross to break down the dividing walls between us and God, and also between us and others from whom we are separated.

In Ephesians 2: 1-10, Paul describes in detail the journey from being dead in our trespasses and sins to being saved by the grace of God. But then he goes on to describe reconciliation through Christ's death not only to God but also to one another. This passage is vital for the inter-cultural, multi-ethnic health of the Christian community. Commenting on Christ's work in vertical and horizontal reconciliation connected to the death of Christ, John Stott writes concerning this passage:

*It is simply impossible, with any shred of Christian integrity, to go on proclaiming that Jesus by his cross has abolished the old divisions and created a single new humanity of love, while at the same time we are contradicting our message by tolerating racial or social or other barriers within our church fellowship . . . We need to get the*

failures of the church on our conscience, to feel the offence to Christ . . . to weep over the credibility gap between the church's talk and the church's walk, to repent of our readiness to excuse and even condone our failures, and to determine to do something about it. I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honor of Christ and for the spread of the gospel, than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God's purpose and Christ's achievement it already is - a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by his Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due his name.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' sacrificial death was not only to reconcile us to God but to each other. God does not forgive us through Jesus so that we and our people experience the benefits of salvation alone. He reconciles us through the blood of Christ so that we can view all "others" through the eyes of reconciliation. Our salvation "eyes" must look upward to the Lord who saves us, but they must also look outward so that we see all of those loved and redeemed by God – from all nations and peoples.

As Christians, we are "crucified with Christ"<sup>2</sup> and that crucifixion includes the crucifixion of our ethnicity, our cultural sense of supremacy, and our desire to find our identity at the expense of another. When we die with Christ, these destructive elements die, and when we are raised again to newness of life, our salvation means the re-making of our identity in Christ.

This does not mean the complete subtraction of our ethnic identity nor the incorporation into some homogeneous, culture-less Christian family. Instead, conversion leads us to a new identity that finds itself first in our relationship with Christ and with his people. ***We still have ethnic uniqueness which we can celebrate and bring into the family of God, but we submit our ethnic identity to our first identity: we belong to Jesus and therefore now we are part of an entirely new community – the household of faith.***

Concerning this matter of identity, consider this: God alone is self-existent, as expressed in the name he gives to Moses in Exodus. In Exodus 4, God refers to himself as "I AM THAT I AM." In other words God says, "I have being within myself. I need no other to define who I am." We, on the other hand, as created beings, derive our sense of identity and existence from some other point of reference. And, as we've noted repeatedly in this course, as sinners, we often find our identity in our ethnic or racial identity, often at the expense of other races or ethnicities.

When we are "in Christ", we no longer need to find our identity at the expense of another. We can be secure in our identity because of our relationship with Jesus. On a personal level, I am still not self-existent, but I can affirm that I am secure because

- I am loved
- I am a forgiven sinner
- I am a child of God
- I am a member of His family

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), pp. 111-112.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 2:20

- Like Paul wrote to the Corinthians, I can say with confidence, “by the grace of God I am what I am.”<sup>3</sup> I can accept and forgive the “other” because I am accepted and forgiven by the grace of God.

### Think about it

Answer Box # 3

Pause here and write a brief prayer of thanksgiving to God for the truth that you can be secure in your identity in Him



**learning**

As followers of the crucified Christ, we give up our identity and let Jesus give it back to us. Like Paul the apostle, we are simultaneously detached from our citizenship (“I became all things to all men”) yet fully accepting of our ethnic heritage (see Paul’s link to his own Jewish identity in Philippians 3).

When we are reconciled through Christ, it is a full conversion. If we are going to follow Jesus, we cannot have Jesus and ethnic identity sharing the “throne” or priority position in our lives. Jesus fills the whole picture of who we are. We respond to his “breaking down the barriers” and empty ourselves of our ethnic heritage. Then we let Jesus redeem it and give it back to us.

#### ***Where do you place the Adjective?***

Let me explain it this way. If someone says to me, “Are you an American Christian?” I say “No, I am a Christian American.” My point is this. If I put “American” first, then I will try to define my Christianity by my American-ness. My sense of American nationality will supersede my Christian faith. My loyalty will be to American cultural values even when they contradict biblical living and harmful to my relationships with Christian brothers and sisters in from other nationalities.

In my case, I am a Christian first, and then I am an American. I celebrate my culture, enjoy the benefits, and I may even cheer for the USA Team in the Olympics or the World Cup. BUT I try to evaluate my American culture and values by the fact that my first identity is in Christ. If my American values contradict my Christian commitments, or if my American identity means belittling or demeaning others to feel good about myself, I want to chose my Christian identity first.

<sup>3</sup> I Corinthians 15:10

Which adjective describes you? Christian first? Or some other cultural or ethnic identity first?

## Co-Humanity

In this Ephesians 2:14-22 passage (as throughout the New Testament), the Holy Spirit presents us with radical vision of inclusiveness – that everyone is welcomed in the Body of Christ. We are brought together in Christ with people that – before Christ in our lives – we might have ignored, rejected, or despised. In the Ephesians passage, the two primary parties, Jews and Gentiles, reflect this amazing new inclusiveness. The term “Gentiles” was coined by the Jews simply to identify them as “not us” or “other.” It was a term of “derision and condemnation.”<sup>4</sup>

“Separation and exclusion are not God’s purpose; cohumanity with and under God is.”<sup>5</sup> Our new co-humanity takes us:

- From being separated; now, in Christ, we are together brought close to God.
- From being alienated; now, in Christ, we are family; we are adopted together.
- From being estranged; now, in Christ, we are no longer strangers to each other, as if we were aliens from another culture.
- From being foreigners; now in Christ, we are fellow citizens; our identity card puts us first in the “country” of faith.
- From being dispossessed; now in Christ, we have moved from being spiritually homeless and separated to becoming together members of God’s household

“The phrase ‘one new humanity’ is a metaphor that the author begs the hearers to externalize; **they are to identify themselves and conduct themselves in ways that express (reveal) their participation in Jesus Christ.**”<sup>6</sup>

Before Christ Jews and Gentiles were “oppositional to one another, patterned by practices of exclusion and the presumption of superiority and inferiority.”<sup>7</sup> This is our new identity, our new common humanity in Christ: Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, black or white, brown or yellow – all these are socially constructed ways of defining and expressing ourselves over against others, and as such they contradict God’s purpose for humanity, the purpose of cohumanity with and for one another, as disclosed in one new human, Jesus of Nazareth.

The question that Jesus’ new humanity forces upon us is this: Has our ability to internalize and externalize Christian identity been constrained and even contradicted by our loyalty and allegiance to other reference groups, including our racial group? Has our old oppositional humanity compromised the response-ability and relations that God intends for God’s human creatures? Have we failed to discern God’s self-disclosure in the reconciliation in Jesus Christ because we prefer the blinders that

<sup>4</sup> Douglas R. Sharp, No Partiality: the Idolatry of Race & the New Humanity (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas R. Sharp, No Partiality: the Idolatry of Race & the New Humanity, p. 265.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 273.



come with self- and group-interest? Have we declined to express this reconciliation because we are more comfortable with our old ways of living and our default position is consistent with the temper of our times?<sup>8</sup>

### Think about it

Answer Box # 4

*Other than the case studies covered in this course, do you personally know of an example where a person's allegiance to their external identity (ethnic, racial, linguistic, etc.) led them to harm someone else from another ethnicity, race, etc. even though that person was a believer – a brother or sister in Christ?*



learning

### **Practical Steps Towards Reconciliation<sup>9</sup>**

Douglas Sharp has observed these five steps as being critical in the process of reconciliation. Because there is often past hurt and mistreatment of the “Other”, he says that there must be:

- 1) Repentance (over and over again) by those who have exercised oppressive power over others.
- 2) Forgiveness by those who had been maligned. Like the title of Desmond Tutu’s book, Sharp acknowledges that there is *“No Future Without Forgiveness.”*
- 3) Enduring effort at building relationships – especially focused on building trust. This means listening to each other’s stories and entering each other’s worlds – like Peter did with Cornelius.
- 4) Incorporation into the Church where the multi-cultural family of God should be living out a new sociocultural order, what Paul calls in Ephesians 2 the “new humanity.” “Gathering ourselves into racially homogenous communities contradicts our new humanity and resists God’s calling; building up ourselves as Christians by appealing consciously or unconsciously to a racial group identity rejects our new humanity and resists God’s empowering; entreating ourselves as Christians by appealing only to those who belong to our racial group subverts our new humanity and resists God’s

<sup>8</sup> Douglas R. Sharp, *No Partiality: the Idolatry of Race & the New Humanity*, p. 274.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287ff.

sending.<sup>10</sup> Critiquing the homogeneous perspective, he continues: “Especially in a racist sociocultural order, homogeneous groups do not demonstrate the gospel as the way of living for new humanity. Instead they compromise the discernment and expression of new humanity in Jesus Christ, contribute to the expressivity of racism and thereby help others – whether Christian or not – to make nonsense of Christianity.”<sup>11</sup>

- 5) Socio-cultural transformation – from a Christian community that is radically transformed, he then suggests the working out of this transformation into the “systems” that drive the greater society, culture, or nation.

### **In Christ, We Are Equally Justified By Faith**

In the book of Galatians, the issue “justification by faith” gets clarified. The “Judaizers” were seeking to attach specific cultural expressions to the requirements for salvation. Specifically, they were requiring that non-Jewish believers adhere to Jewish customs in order to be saved. By addressing ‘justification by faith’ Paul addresses both a theological and a social problem: “The Church’s misunderstanding of justification led to a social stratification within the Church, a stratification that was contrary to the unity in Christ that lay at the heart of the Christian faith.”<sup>12</sup>

Let’s translate this theology for the Christian community today: “If a church does not defend in practice the equality and unity of all in Christ, it implicitly communicates that justification is not by faith but by race, social status or some other standard.”<sup>13</sup> Salvation can have no attachment to race, culture, or ethnic identity. Jesus death on the cross invites all people from every nation to receive the gift of forgiveness. At the foot of the Cross, the ground is level.

### **United Around the Lord’s Table**

An inner city pastor in a tough section of New York City was working to reach out to street gang members. Street gangs in American cities often wear hats or coats that identify their “colors.” In other words, their clothing identifies them with a specific gang. If a gang member wears his colors walking through the neighborhood dominated by an opposing gang, it could spark a fight or that gang member might be killed.

When members of various gangs started becoming Christians, the pastor wanted to teach them that the reconciling death of Christ meant that they needed to be reconciled to each other – even if they were from rival gangs. Therefore, when the members from various gangs came together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the pastor required that they leave their “colors” behind. They were required to come to the Table of the Lord together, having symbolically left behind the ethnic identifiers that separated them.

As these young men grew in their faith, the pastor eventually had a special service where he asked the young men to come forward to lay their “colors” at the foot of the Cross. As the young men came, they also began emptying their pockets of

<sup>10</sup> Douglas R. Sharp, No Partiality: the Idolatry of Race & the New Humanity, p. 296.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>12</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 183.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

knives and guns and laid these at the Cross. As these young men realized that in Christ they were all one new “gang” in Christ, they discarded not only the symbols of their past hostility (their “colors”) but also the weapons of their hostility.

### **United Around the Table in Apartheid South Africa**

In an earlier Unit, we already highlighted the significance in the book of Acts of eating together. Writing about that early fellowship, Andrew Walls observes, “Two lifestyles met at the institution that had once symbolized the ethnic and cultural division: the meal table. One of the most noticeable features of life in the Jesus community in Jerusalem had been that the followers of Jesus took every opportunity to eat together.”<sup>14</sup>

One of the little known background factors in the dissolution of Apartheid in South Africa was the work of a ministry called *Koinonia* led by “doubly converted” Dutch Reformed Pastor Nico Smith.

Nico is an Afrikaner and a former member of the *Bruderbond*, the Afrikaner champions of Apartheid (the sociological equivalent of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States). In the 1970’s, as a Dutch Reformed missionary to a Black section of South Africa, Nico Smith was confronted with the inconsistency of his own Apartheid worldview. He found himself with Christian brothers and sisters that his worldview forbid him to eat with.

This deeply troubled him and led to his second conversion – much like Peter in Acts 10. He abandoned the *Bruderbond* and moved in the Black Township of Mamelodi (near Pretoria) to become one of the first white men to pastor a Black church. From there he founded *Koinonia*, a ministry that brought whites and blacks together to share a meal. This “table fellowship”, in a land where an estimated 70% of the population was in racially segregated churches on Sunday morning, started to break down the dividing walls – to the point that Nico was named “Man of the Year” by *Time Magazine – Africa* in the mid-1980’s, several years before the release of Nelson Mandela and the subsequent dissolution of the Apartheid system.

Walls, reflecting back to the New Testament Church, reminds us that in many cross-cultural situations, the table symbolizes unity. He writes, “Two races and cultures historically separated by the meal together now met at table to share the knowledge of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> (Walls, p. 78).

He continues, underscoring the challenge of cross-cultural table fellowship for the early church: “The shared table was the acid test. It stood for diverse humanity redeemed by Christ and sharing in him.”<sup>16</sup> Walls goes on to note Peter’s backsliding when, under the influence of the Judaizers, he refused to eat with Gentiles (see Galatians 2:11-14) thus demonstrating that he had retreated from the message of the vision God had given him in Acts 10.

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Walls, “The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History,” *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Orbis, 2002), p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 5

We have read several examples of taking meals together as a powerful symbol of unity in spite of cultural or ethnic differences. Why do you think that the communion table – the Lord’s meal table – is such a powerful symbol in the fellowship of believers. Name every reason you can think of.

**learning****A Tutsi Testimony of Identity in the Cross Of Christ**

Antoine Rutayisire, is from Rwanda. He writes from experience as an evangelist and as a Tutsi. He spoke to the 10,000 evangelists and church leaders gathered at “Amsterdam 2000” about the reconciling work of Christ on the Cross. Listen carefully to his sermon.

My last point is the Cross of Jesus Christ and the crisis of identity. People are wondering, ‘Who am I?’ It’s a problem of identity. Because of urban explosion and the fast changes in science and technology, we live in a more impersonal, stone-cold, lonely world. We live in socially disconnected, individualistic environments, feeding on self-gratification and self-centeredness. Many have lost their sense of belonging and community. Knowing who you are in Jesus Christ is a great thing because in a genocide, the first thing which is denied to you is your value as a human being. And during those days the voice of the Lord kept telling me, ‘Remember, you are not a Tutsi. That’s not your identity. You are a child of God.’ And I tell you, that is who we are. We need to preach the Cross of Jesus Christ to give value to the world.

The Bible says, ‘It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect’ (1 Peter 1:18-19, NIV). That is the value God has given us. Usually a thing is valuable according to the price you pay to get it. God paid for us with the blood of His own Son. That is your value in the eyes of God. The Bible says, ‘The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory’ (Romans 8:16-17, NIV). And, ‘How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we

should be called children of God! And that is what we are!' (1 John 3:1, NIV). That is what we are. We are God's children. That is the value that He has given to us.

Not only God's children-that is our identity-but we are also God's community. The Bible says, 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). Again the Bible says, 'Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for us to redeem us from all and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good' (Titus 2:13-14, NIV): That is our identity in Christ. That is our community in Christ.

The Bible says that when you are in Christ, 'There is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all' (Colossians 3:11, NIV). We are one family in Christ. We need to work hard at rebuilding the fellowship of the holy nation of God. The closer we get to Christ, the closer we get to each other. And that is how we build our community. Get nearer to Christ; you will get nearer and closer to your neighbor and your friend."<sup>17</sup> (The Mission of an Evangelist, p. 257)

### **Reconciliation through the Blood of Christ.**

Understanding our new identity under the reconciling work of Christ is essential in forgiving the past, finding healing in our societies, and working towards long-term peace.

#### ***The testimony of Deborah Nyirakabirikira***<sup>18</sup>

Dave Toycen is the president of World Vision Canada. He reports the following story from his interactions in Rwanda after the genocide:

I have seen generosity and peacemaking join together in some of the most difficult situations imaginable. The pace can be slow and halting, yet there are dramatic examples of ordinary people who make a profound difference. Deborah Nyirakabirikira was a mother who had survived the genocide in Rwanda, Africa, in 1994. Along with the rest of her country, she was trying to put her life together again after the killing and violence. Deborah's husband had been killed, so she relied heavily on her eleven children. One son, nineteen-year-old Innocent, was a special source of joy and satisfaction in a life that had been framed by death and disappointment.

Being a woman of deep faith, Deborah had a practice of praying every morning in the back room of her small house. In April 1997 she had been troubled by a vision that Innocent was going to be killed. Deborah felt so strongly about this devastating image that she shared it with Innocent. She recalls that they even spent time together discussing and praying about this. On a subsequent evening, after Innocent had cooked a meal for the family, some soldiers came to the door and asked for Innocent. They explained that they wanted to ask him some questions and assured her they would not kill him.

<sup>17</sup> The Mission of an Evangelist (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 2001), p. 257.

<sup>18</sup> Taken from Dave Toycen, *The Power of Generosity* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2004), pp. 81ff

Shortly after leaving with the soldiers, Innocent returned to his mother and said to her, 'Mummy, they are going to kill me.' She embraced him, but the soldiers pulled them apart, and minutes later Deborah heard the gunshots that took her son's life. At Innocent's funeral, she was overcome by grief and questioned how God could allow such a tragedy. In spite of her emotional and intellectual struggles, she continued her practice of prayer and meditation. On one of these occasions Deborah had a vision that showed a house built on a bridge across a deep chasm. The only way across the chasm was through this house. Below the house were these words: 'The way to heaven is through the house of your enemy.'

Deborah was comforted by the people from her church, her faith in God, and an overwhelming sense that something redemptive was to come from this tragedy. Some weeks later, three soldiers came to her door. Her first thought was that they had come to kill her. Then one soldier, whom she recognized from the previous visit, stepped forward and led her by the shoulder into the sitting room. He closed the door, and Deborah expected to be killed. Instead he turned to her and said, 'Pray for me.' They got down on their knees together and she began to pray for him.

After the prayer, the soldier said, 'My name is Charles,' and began to cry. Charles admitted that he was the one who had killed her son as the result of Innocent telling the authorities about a theft he had been involved in. As time had passed he had felt increasingly guilty and despondent. He said to Deborah, 'Would you forgive me? If not, take me to court and I am prepared to be killed for my crime, because this is the law.'

Deborah was stunned at first and then began to pray for direction. Her response would become part of Rwanda's healing. She remembered the strange vision and the words 'the way to heaven is through the house of your enemy.' Deborah told this young man that she was prepared to forgive him. She had no desire to turn him in to the authorities because he would simply rot in jail and eventually be executed. She had already lost her son; there was no reason to lose another young man.

In re-telling this story, Deborah explains how her memory of the vision and the words of forgiveness in the Bible began to overwhelm her. She hugged Charles and they began to cry. Deborah describes how a great burden had been lifted from them, even though it was very hard. She told Charles, 'The only punishment I can inflict on you is to take you in place of my son and to feed you the food I would have given my son.' Charles turned to her and said, 'I am your child now. I will visit you whenever I can.'

In the months and years that have followed, Deborah has shared this experience with the wider community in Rwanda, and many have found her example an essential step in learning to forgive. Deborah comments on the difference in her town. 'Ruhengeri is now a different place. The killings have stopped, the Interahamwe [the genocidal paramilitaries] are gone and peace has returned to my beautiful corner of Rwanda. I am proud to have played a small part in bringing this about.'

In a country where an estimated one million people died in genocide, Deborah's witness is an important contribution to healing and reconciliation. In this extraordinary story, numerous elements of generosity, forgiveness and compassion form a fabric of reconciliation that is impossible to separate. Generosity is an attitude that affects each of the other elements. Deborah was willing to think the unthinkable and consider the impossible. She was willing to step outside the world of her own grave injustice and consider an alternative. Her religious faith challenged the prevailing paradigm of an

eye for an eye and a life for a life. In stories like these, there is a willingness to give up the need for payback. Like others I have met, Deborah came to the realization that if she did not forgive she would be burdened with anger and the desire for revenge for the rest of her life. The generosity to the perpetrator is matched by the victim's wish to be free of the insidious, paralyzing despair that would inevitably follow vengeance.

Deborah also discovered that all of Charles' immediate family had been murdered during the genocide. His future was filled with anger and retribution: it could have been a mirror of hers. Deborah's willingness to look outside herself enabled her to look into another person's pain, even though she was from a different ethnic clan in Rwanda. Generosity reflects an attitude toward life that enhances the possibility of seeing others as you see yourself. The needs of others become a reflection of the wants and desires that rest deep in the emotional and spiritual life of every person.

As Rwanda continues its slow journey back to harmony and reconciliation, its political leaders are using a judicial approach that releases those judged of lesser genocidal crimes back to their local villages where they will confess and work toward reconciliation. It's a grand experiment in human dynamics as well as justice, generosity and reconciliation. In a small country where thousands have confessed their complicity in genocidal crime, it is the only practical way forward. Deborah is one of many who are determined to break free from the demons of the past and live in a different way. She is helping to create the hope that is the salvation of a country carrying the burden of mass killing and hatred.

Peacemaking, whether in our own personal relationships or in the wider community, requires an attitude of generosity. Small actions take on great significance. The willingness to take risk is critical. It's also clear that the parties involved must be open to a different future—one filled with hope rather than vengeance. The natural desire to strike back will perpetuate the anger and hostilities between both parties. Pushing aside the past hurts to concentrate on the new future is what makes peacemaking possible.

### Think about it

Answer Box #6

*Personal Reflection: Who in your life and past do you need to forgive? Remember that bitterness destroys the one who holds it – not the object of the bitterness. What steps are you going to take towards forgiveness? Talk through your action steps with your mentor.*



learning

**A Prayer**

When considering what it means to live a life characterized by forgiveness and reconciliation, consider this *Prayer for Graciousness Towards Others*<sup>19</sup> written by Gordon MacDonald (Easter 2006). (It is written in the American context, but the principles of understanding gracious reconciliation should still be evident no matter what your context.)

Heavenly Father,

Help me remember that the jerk who cut me off in traffic last night is a single mother who worked nine hours that day and is rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious minutes with her children.

Help me to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't make change correctly is a worried 19 year old college student, balancing his worry over final exams with his fear of not knowing what to do with life.

Remind me, Lord, that the scary looking bum, begging for money in the same spot every day (who really ought to get a job, Lord!) is a slave to addictions and mental illness that I can only imagine in my worst nightmares.

Help me to remember that the old couple walking annoyingly slow through the store aisles and blocking my shopping progress is a couple that is savoring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this could be one of the last trips to the store together.

Heavenly Father, remind me that sooner rather than later I will breath my last.

Remind me each day that life is too short to stay angry.

Remind me that you see us all as precious and that I should see everyone that way too. Remind me that it is not enough to share that love with those we hold dear. Let me be slow to judge and quick to forgive. Remind me, O Lord, to live and love just as Jesus did.

In the name of the One who took your anger so we wouldn't have to. Amen.

**Bible Study: Joseph**

The biblical concept of reconciliation carries with it the notion of healed relationships. Jesus came not only to restore the relationship between God and us, but also to reconcile us to each other. Experiencing God's forgiveness is often easier than forgiving and releasing those who have hurt us, but the Bible teaches that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us. Joseph provides a very powerful example of Christ-like forgiveness towards those who hurt him.

By Genesis 42, we find Joseph enjoying worldwide power and acclaim. He's "living the good life" in the palaces of Egypt, with prestige and wealth beyond his wildest dreams. But God interrupts his life with the arrival of some hungry nomads from the North – his brothers. And as a result, Joseph gets transported back into a life that he had forgotten after they had sold him into slavery more than twenty years before.

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<sup>19</sup> Written by Gordon MacDonald, Easter 2006.



**Think about it****Answer Box # 7**

Read Genesis 42:1-38

- 1) What emotions do you see in all the people cited in this chapter – from Jacob (Israel) to Joseph to his brothers?
  
- 2) Why does Joseph throw his brothers in prison? Why do the brothers think they are getting thrown in prison?
  
- 3) How do you know that Joseph has virtually divorced himself from his past?

**bible study****Regarding the naming of Joseph's sons**

Miroslav Volf looks to the naming of Joseph's sons to illustrate his complicated relationship with his past, a past that now stands before him as his brothers return to his life. He reminds us of the complicated issue of the importance of remembering past hurt *so that we can forgive and forget it*.

In the well-known story in the book of Genesis, Joseph was ready to undertake the difficult journey of reconciliation with his brothers who sold him into slavery because, as he put it, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house' (41:51). Before coming to an end, the journey of reconciliation entailed a good deal of remembering, however. Joseph himself was reminded of the suffering his brothers had caused, and subtly but powerfully he made them remember it too (42:21-23; 44:27ff.). Yet, like the distant light of a place called home, the divine gift of forgetting what he still remembered – 'backgrounding' the memory might be the right term – guided the whole journey of return. Wanting to insure that the precious gift be lost neither on him nor on his posterity, Joseph inscribed it into the name of his son, Manasseh – 'one who causes to be forgotten.' A paradoxical memorial to forgetting (how can one be reminded to forget without being reminded of what one should forget?), Manasseh's presence recalled the suffering in order to draw attention to the loss of its memory. It is this strange forgetting, still interspersed with indispensable remembering, that made Joseph, the victim, able to embrace his brothers, the perpetrators (45:14-15) – and become theirs and his own savior (46:1ff).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Oneness, and Reconciliation. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 139.

**Think about it****Answer Box # 8**

*Read Genesis 43:1-34.* Again: what emotions were present in this second visit?

*Read Genesis 44:1-34:* Why do you think Joseph is playing the “cat and mouse” game with his brothers?

Read Genesis 45:1-15

- What emotion does Joseph express? What would you be feeling if you were one of the brothers?
- Given all that has transpired in chapters 42-45, what do you learn about the emotions that might occur when broken relationships are in the process of being reconciled?
- What does Joseph see as the purposes of his servitude, imprisonment, and separation from his family?
- How would you feel to know that all of your suffering was ultimately not just allowed by God but designed by him?

The Hebrew mindset saw God as ultimately the source of all that occurs in one’s life. If good things happened, it came from God. If bad things happened, these came from God too. Job reflects this worldview when he attributes his losses to the hand of God (Job 1:21), asks his wife, “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God and not receive the bad?” (Job 2:10). Job finally resolves to stay faithful even if God kills him (Job 13:15). Isaiah reflects the same perspective with the attribution both of light and darkness, weal and woe, to God (Isaiah 45:7). Jeremiah, facing incredible hardship, asks, “is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?” (Lamentations 3:38).

**Think about it?****Answer Box # 9**

*Read Genesis 50:15-21*

- Why do the brothers fear? How do they deal with their fears?
- How do you know that Joseph's forgiveness is genuine?
- As you face the challenge of forgiving and releasing others, what do you find most challenging about the example of Joseph

*Stop and pray: ask God for grace to be an "aggressive forgiver" – forgiving people long before they ask.*

**Giving up the desire for revenge:**

As the Genesis account ends, Joseph speaks peace to his brothers. He reaffirms the sovereign hand of God in all of their doings, and the forgiveness is completed.

Throughout the rest of Joseph's life, from age 30 to age 110 when he died, we will hear not one word of resentment on his heart or from his lips. Not a word of blame against the brothers who sold him into slavery, not a word of bitterness against Potiphar's wife, not a word of rebuke against the cupbearer (who had forgotten him. Joseph was eventually in a position to get even with all of them. But he didn't.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of unfair treatment, made up accusations, rejection, and abandonment, Joseph refused to become resentful or bear a grudge or succumb to bitterness. Joseph's forgiveness teaches to let go of the past. "Forgiveness is giving up all hope of having had a different past."<sup>22</sup> Joseph had let go of that hope. He had accepted his past and had moved on.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Swindoll, Joseph: Man of Integrity and Forgiveness (Nashville: Word, 1998), p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Anne Lamott, Traveling Mercies (New York: Pantheon, 1999), p. 213.

“The final proof of greatness lies in being able to endure contemptuous treatment without resentment.”<sup>23</sup> Can we be like Joseph?

You and I choose what will hold us hostage. We make a choice about who is going to hold us under their thumb. We can often decide who and what will depress us. There isn't a person reading this who doesn't have a store of painful memories that could absolutely defeat you. But they need not. You may need help in turning the wound into a stingless scar. You may need a friend, a mate, even a professional counselor to come alongside to help you in the process of getting rid of those stings. Learn this wonderful lesson with me: We do not need to be defeated by bad memories.<sup>24</sup>

## Final Assignment



## application

### Final Assignment

To frame your response, read these two quotations:

“Salvation is more than believers receiving forgiveness of their sins. . . Salvation means union with one another.”(J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 190.)

“Nowhere is this theology more important for modern Christians than in dealing with *racial hostility*. Christians of other races are part of us, and divisions cannot be allowed to continue. The racial barrier is like a festering wound in the body of Christ... Sunday is often the most segregated day of the week, for Christians worship along racial lines... The perversion of both active and passive racism must be challenged and stopped. . . Racism will have to be treated on two levels, both as a general societal problem and specifically within the body of Christ. Racism in any form is prohibited by the equality of all people before God and by his unrestricted love. But the theology of the body of Christ deals with the issue at another level. ***The point is not merely that all Christians are equal; rather, the point is that all Christians have been joined, which has far more significance and impact***” (K. Snodgrass, Ephesians, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 150-151.)

*“Union with one another” and being “joined” means being reconciled personally as well as in groups. If during this study, God has shown you someone whom you need to forgive, take the action steps he has shown you and share your results in a 1- to 2-page reflection paper.*

<sup>23</sup> Charles Swindoll, Joseph, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Swindoll, Joseph, p. 38.

# **Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity**

## ***Unit 11***

### ***The Work of Christ: One New Humanity***



## **Development Associates International**

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# Unit 11 – The Work of Christ: One New Humanity

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Define the concept of Christ as our first (or supreme) identity
- Explain the images of Ephesians 2 as they pertain to Christ’s work and God’s design for the multicultural Christian community.
- List at least five the implications in your own context of what it means for diverse people to become “one new humanity” in Christ
- Explain why “unity” does not require “uniformity”

**Additional Reading for this unit from the textbook:**

**“Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility”, Chapter 11 (pp. 138-150)**

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### Introduction and Author's Note

The biblical truths that we've been studying throughout this course were designed to change the Christian community from the book of Acts until today, but we are all familiar with the sad stories throughout history when the Church has failed in this mission of "unity in the midst of diversity." At times Christians have acted towards other people in ways that have dishonored the reality that other people are "created in the image of God." The Holy Crusades, the institution of slavery, the treatment of native peoples by colonizers, the Christian support of caste systems, or the myriad of wars between people and nations all testify that Christians have often been no different than non-Christians in the ways that they treat the "Other."

And the Christian treatment of other Christians has often not been much better – from Protestant versus Catholic wars, to the design of Apartheid in South Africa, to the tragedies in Rwanda and Burundi all illustrate that Christians have sadly fallen prey to the temptation to identify themselves first by their ethnicity or some other external label – to exalt one's own people at the expense of the "Other."

But God is doing something new in these days. Lamin Sanneh observes that "...Christianity is the religion of over two thousand different language groups in the world. More people pray and worship in more languages in Christianity than in any other religion in the world."<sup>1</sup> The Christian community is more diverse, more cross-cultural, and more global than it has ever been. Could it be that Christianity is discovering afresh what it means to "One" in Christ?

This new development is what Andrew Walls calls "The Ephesians Moment." He's referring to the passage that we're examining – Ephesians 2:14-22 – where the reconciling work of Christ is identified as the barrier-breaker between separated peoples. Walls writes:

*But in our day the Ephesian moment has come again, and come in a richer mode than has ever happened since the first century. Developments over several centuries, reaching a climax in the twentieth, mean that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in the church... **diversity was part of the church's unity. The church must be diverse because humanity is diverse; it must be one because Christ is one. Christ is human, and open to humanity in all its diversity; the fullness of his humanity takes in all its diverse cultural forms. The Ephesian letter is not about cultural homogeneity; cultural diversity had already been built into the church by its decision not to enforce the Torah. It is a celebration of the union of irreconcilable entities, the breaking down of the wall of partition, brought about by Christ's death (Ephesians 2: 13-18). Believers from the different communities are different bricks being used for the construction of a single building – a temple where the One God would live (Ephesians 2:1-22)***<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lamin Sanneh. *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Walls, "The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History," *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Orbis, 2002), pp. 77-78.

### A Little Review to This point:

We've affirmed that we believe that we are a new creation in Christ according to II Corinthians 5:17, but we've recognized that too often we interpret this individualistically. We overlook the fact that we are now part of a new household that includes people who are incredibly different than ourselves. But Ephesians 2 as well as the book of Acts reminds us that from this multi-cultural group of diverse people, God is building a new community, a globally diverse household, a new humanity.

All of this is possible because being a disciple of Jesus Christ means a new identity, a citizenship in heaven which supersedes all other citizenships, nationalities, or ethnic loyalties. "God's plan is not just that the gospel will go to all peoples, but that all peoples will be brought together through the gospel to form one people in Christ."<sup>3</sup> Chris Sugden paints a great picture of the redeemed family of God in which he identifies both the need for and submission of our ethnic identities:

"The universality of the gospel, which relativizes all other definitions of identity and claims to loyalty, does not replace or suppress people's identity; neither is it a recipe for uniformity. It is meant to create a community marked by a mutuality of relationship where people have to find their identity in partnership with people who are different from them."<sup>4</sup>

Regarding Christ as our supreme identity, McNeil and Richardson write, "Christ says to us, 'I want to be your most important identity.' Christ is more important than our racial or ethnic identities. This does not cancel or dismiss our cultural identity; it simply supersedes them as the most significant."<sup>5</sup> Referring to Matthew 10:34-36 (abandon all to follow Jesus), they write, "The message of Jesus is clear. Anyone who identifies more with their family, their culture, or their ethnic heritage is not worthy of Christ. Willingness to relinquish these other identities as most important is the path that leads to true and lasting life."<sup>6</sup> In the "new humanity" of Ephesians 2, "The people of our racial ethnic or cultural group are no longer our most significant point of identity. Instead, our identity is rooted in our connectedness to Christ and his people."<sup>7</sup>

This unity in diversity marks a Christian community where ethnic worldviews have been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting back to the Luke's emphasis on the fullness of the Holy Spirit as a key to multi-ethnic inclusion in the Body of Christ, Hays goes even further, noting that existing racisms may indicate a conspicuous absence of the Holy Spirit:

"As a pattern of true discipleship, Luke reminds the Church today that the gospel demands that we forsake our inherited culturally driven racial prejudices, and accept all people, especially those different from us as integral parts of the Church. The demolishing of racial barriers within the Church is a task in which the Spirit leads us. ***I would also suggest that the inverse is true: flourishing racial prejudice within a church is probably indicative of the Spirit's absence.***"<sup>8</sup>

### Think about it

<sup>3</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Sugden, "God and the Nations" in Patrick Benson, ed., The Church and the Nations (EFAC Bulletin, 47, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson The Heart of Racial Justice, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 179.



## Answer Box # 1

*Do you serve or worship in a context that is ethnically mono-cultural? Is this because of historical racism or because of passivity in developing multi-ethnic relationships? If your context is largely mono-ethnic or mono-cultural, list as many of the causes that you can think of.*



## learning

### Historical Images

Earlier in this Unit, we alluded to the track record in history of the Christian church. Some of the actions of Christians have been better than others. Four brief historical allusions help remind us what we're after. The first two are positive, but the last two illustrate the church's historical inability to create a cross-cultural community of equals.

**#1. Serampore, India.** On the positive side of history, we have William Carey's multi-ethnic church in Serampore, India. This was a multi-cultural church that created, in effect, a new humanity. Because of its diversity, one historian observed that the church "didn't look like anybody there." This church grew out of Carey's own vision of the "New Humanity" that God was building – in contrast to the ethnically-dominated and caste-driven culture of the India of his day.

His 1804 "Covenant of Agreement" gave evidence to Carey's multi-racial understanding of the church and the mission of the church. In this 10-point covenant, Carey emphasized "the infinite value of men's souls," the desire to "esteem and treat Indians as equals" and the prioritizing of the "missionary obligation" on the Indians, "since Indians only can win India for Christ." Though he and his European co-workers had a difficulty in implementing their ideals, the document sets Carey apart from the superiority attitudes of other colonizers.

**#2. Latin American "Mixedness".** A second illustration of the new humanity comes from Philip Jenkins' discussion of the Latin American concept of "mixedness" (*mestizaje*). The development and use of this term offer a powerful analogy to the "new humanity" pictured in Ephesians 2.

"Given the historic social inequalities of the Latin countries, Hispanic theology is acutely concerned with issues of liberation, suffering, and social justice, while matters of race are also paramount. Some of the most active thinkers have

been Latinos based in North America, and a key concept in these circles is that of *mestizaje*, “mixedness,” the status of being a *mestizo* or mixed blood. In contemporary theology, *mestizaje* is so critical because it transcends traditional racial hierarchies. It comes closer to the New Testament goal of a society without racial privilege or domination, in which there is either Jew nor Greek, Latino or Anglo. And while mixed race people were traditionally marginalized and despised, newer theologians see this status as uniquely privileged.”<sup>9</sup>

“*Mestizaje* allows a society to draw equally on its diverse cultural inheritances. ‘The mestizo affirms both the identities received while offering something new to both. ... It is a potent theology for a world of deracinated migrants and wanderers.”<sup>10</sup>

It is also a powerful analogy of the biblical imagery in Ephesians 2 (see below) – where different peoples come together and bring their differences under Christ, and, in the process, form a new humanity.

**#3. The Donatist Controversy.** The third example is negative. After the Edict of Milan, the Donatist Controversy welcomed back those who had denied Christ. This welcome, however, was racially driven and based on ethnicity. Latin-speaking peoples were welcomed back; Berbers and North Africans were not. Those from North Africa were reduced to second-class citizenship, thus setting the foundation for the demise of the North African church.<sup>11</sup> Some argue that this mistreatment by the dominant church in Rome so disillusioned the spirits of the North African people that they opened themselves to Islam when it progressed across their region.

**#4. Latin American “Mixedness” – the Down Side.** Another negative example came as the precursor to the grace-redeemed analogy of the *mestizaje* cited above. When Jesuits came to Latin America in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they came with a multi-racial dream of utopia influenced more by secular writers of their day – like Voltaire – than by the biblical teaching of Ephesians. They dreamt of creating a new civilization in Latin America by intermarrying the Spaniards with the indigenous peoples and so creating a so-called “super-race.” Their teaching resulted in many abuses of the native peoples as colonizers abused the people, assaulted their human dignity and disregarded their cultural uniqueness.

### Think about it

Answer Box # 2

Can you think of examples in your own community, your own city, or your own country where the behavior of Christians towards minority people has been a positive testimony for the Gospel? A negative testimony? Explain.



learning

<sup>9</sup> Philip Jenkins. The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 116.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette. A History of Christianity: Volume I (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1975), p. 139.

## What Is the Biblical Vision? New Creations in a New Humanity!

The 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the International Fellowship of Missions Theologians, met in Osijek, Croatia in 1991 in the midst of intense inter-cultural wars between Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians. Together they crafted a document<sup>12</sup> that sets the tone in this section for what we are looking for in our understanding of the united diversity of the Body of Christ.

They start the document by affirming diversity: “Ethnic diversity is part of God’s creativity and it is God’s plan for all creation to glorify him. Therefore the riches of ethnic variety can be affirmed where it gives glory to God.” Then they go on to describe how this fits into the biblical teaching on the new humanity created in Christ:

God’s creative and redemptive intention is for all peoples to become part of the people of God. This purpose, however, is hindered by human fallenness, as a result of which ethnicity tends to be absolutized and thereby is distorted into idolatrous ethnocentrism. God’s redemptive work dethrones all idolatries and therefore when a person becomes a member of the people of God through Christ, a new identity is received.

They direct us to the balance of ethnicity as it applies to the Body of Christ:

This new identity relativizes every ethnic identity, but does not efface it or invalidate its cultural expression. Citizenship in the Kingdom of God is the only absolute, non-negotiable identity for the Christian, besides which all other levels of identity are mobile and may be freely affirmed or laid aside for the sake of the Gospel.

The Gospel affirms ethnic identity by enabling the Christian to rejoice in it for its intrinsic created goodness, to subordinate it to the Lordship of Christ, and to use it for the service of God and the neighbor.

They conclude with a wonderfully crafted image of the “new humanity” that stands together, united in our diversity under the Cross of Christ:

***“The church, therefore, includes all ethnic groups, is a sign of God’s multi-ethnic people and kingdom. It should affirm healthy ethnicity and the positive values of nationhood where these do not either become idolatrous towards God or oppressive towards fellow human beings.”***

Many of the authors of this statement, including Peter Kuzmic of Croatia, understood the problem of nationalizing the church (Croatian Catholicism versus Serbian Orthodoxy, for example). As a result, they go on to challenge the church to stand up against governments that manipulate ethnicities and practice ethnic idolatry that results in oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and ethnic cleansing.

The statement calls the church to assist in the protection and recovery of the human rights of ethnic groups that have been oppressed: “In such contexts, it is superficial to deal with ethnicity questions without regard to issues of social, economic, and political freedom and justice.”

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<sup>12</sup> “Ethnic Identities and Christian Peoplehood”

**Think about it**

Answer Box #

Re-read the quotations cited above. Underline the statements from that document might be most relevant in your context.

**learning****FROM *Panta ta Ethne* TO *Panta ta Ethne***

The phrase *panta ta ethne* (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:47) has most often been applied to the sense of the “target” – the ethnically diverse people we’re trying to reach in world evangelization or missions.

- But does it apply to just the target of our discipleship?
- Or is discipleship not completed until we find all nations in our fellowship?
- Has the church together “from every nation to every nation” always been the intent of God?
- Is Acts 13 the prototypical missional church?

If so, we must evaluate the meaning of *panta ta ethne* for the senders as well as the recipients. Specific passages in Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians set the tone for evaluating what the community of “new creations” – individuals - are supposed to look like in the “new community” – the household of faith.

**Galatians 3:28-29** illustrates a dramatic transformation in the family of Christ. Put in its historical context, the inclusive language appears both as a radical testimony of Paul the Pharisee’s cultural conversion in Christ and as a rebuke to the Judaizers who desired to maintain Jewish culture as a prerequisite for salvation. William Barclay writes, “There is something of very great interest here. In the Jewish morning prayer, which Paul must all his pre-Christian life have used, the Jew thanks God that ‘Thou hast not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman.’ Paul takes that prayer and reverses it. The old distinctions were gone; all were one in Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

This passage is a testimony of a totally transformed worldview for followers of Christ:

“When Paul states that ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,’ he strikes at three of the major barrier-forming divisions in human society.... the three pairs represent the fundamental cleavages of human existence: ethnicity, economic capacity, and sexuality. The result is a radically reshaped social world order as viewed from a Christian perspective. Thus... the body of Christ is an egalitarian body with universal scope where social, sexual, and ethnic differences do not determine entrance or status and are not the basis of unity and cohesion of the group.”<sup>14</sup>

Taking the application to the church today, R. B. Hays stresses the issue of identity that emerges from this passage. He notes that there are some groups within the Church that seek to define identity on the basis of race or national origin. He suggests, “such

<sup>13</sup> William Barclay. The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians (Louisville, KY: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 32-33.

<sup>14</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, pp. 185-186.

movements are the contemporary analogies of the ‘circumcision party’ within the early church, against which Paul so passionately fought.”<sup>15</sup> He goes on to challenge us Christian leaders: “Paul’s passionate rejection of this kind of ethnic/religious ‘identity politics’ should lead us to reflect carefully on the ground of our own identity. To what extent is our sense of who we are grounded in the gospel of Christ, and to what extent is it determined by other factors?”<sup>16</sup>

Galatians egalitarian vision of the family of Christ speaks directly to believers all around the world in locations where ethnic tensions and ethnic prejudices from within the culture are pressuring Christians to embrace the same ethnic prejudices within the Church

**Ephesians 1:5** introduces us to a letter referring to “outsiders” or “others” being “adopted” into a new family. Paul writes (1:10) that God’s purposes in the Church and in Christ is to “bring all things together under one head” namely Jesus Christ (1:22). After describing God’s work of saving us by grace through faith, Paul then transitions into a description of this uniting work of Christ. In Ephesians 2:14 and following, Paul describes Jesus as our peace. He is the One who makes two into one. He is the one who destroys the “barriers” that once divided us. He is the one who demolished the “dividing wall of hostility.”

How does Jesus do this (Ephesians 2:15)? By abolishing the law. In other words, the very thing that distinguished the Jew from the Gentile – the Mosaic Law – was abolished through Christ’s obedience, death, and resurrection. He did this so that he could create one new humanity out of the two.

As a result (Ephesians 2:16), insiders and outsiders are both reconciled through the Cross. Together we become (through Christ’s obedience and death (2:19-22):

- Fellow citizens
- Members of God’s household
- A holy temple
- A Spirit-filled dwelling

### Think about it

#### Answer Box # 4

*The theology all sounds good, but “What does this “new humanity” look like? How does Ephesians 2 get lived out in your Christian organization or your Christian fellowship?*



**learning**

<sup>15</sup> R. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians” in L.E. Keck (ed.), The New Interpreters Bible (Nashville, Abingdon, 2000), p. 274.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Walls asserts that the message of Ephesians did not allow for culturally distinct communities but rather a new building where differing factions are united: “Emphatically, there was to be only ONE Christian community.”<sup>17</sup>

## Think about it

Answer Box # 5

*From your perspective or in your context, how do denominations help or hinder the desire that the church be “one”?*



**learning**

## Ephesian Images: Understanding the Texts

To get a full picture of the radical nature of the “new humanity” God wants for us in the church, I return to the Ephesian passages. The historical background (provided primarily by William Barclay) vividly portrays the challenge of creating a truly multi-cultural church where our ethnic uniqueness and cultural background is affirmed, but ethnocentrism is suppressed under our unity in Christ.

### **Read Ephesians 2:11-22**

Barclay writes:

“The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. They said that the Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of Hell; that God loved only Israel of all the nations that he had made; that the best of the serpents crushed, the best of the Gentiles killed. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile woman in childbirth, for that would be to bring another Gentile into the world. The barrier between Jew and Gentile was absolute. If a Jew married a Gentile, the funeral of that Jew was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death; even to go into a Gentile house rendered a Jew unclean.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Walls, “The Ephesian Moment:”, p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Barclay. Galatians and Ephesians, p. 107.

**Read Ephesians 2:14**

Paul writes “who made the two one and has destroyed the barrier.” Barclay observes:

“Paul uses an even more vivid picture. He says that the middle wall of the barrier between has been torn down. This is a picture from the Temple. The Temple consisted of a series of courts, each one a little higher than the one that went before, with the Temple itself in the inmost of the courts. First there was the Court of the Gentiles; then the Court of the Women; then the Court of the Israelites; then the Court of the Priests; and finally the Holy Place itself.”

“Only into the first of them could a Gentile come. Between it and the Court of the Women there was a wall, or rather a kind of screen of marble, beautifully wrought, and let into it at intervals were tablets which announced that if a Gentile proceeded any farther he was liable to instant death.”<sup>19</sup>

Ephesians 2:14 reminds us that one of the main purposes of Jesus death was to bring separated peoples together, first into fellowship with God (with whom we were once at enmity – see Ephesians 2:1-10) and then into fellowship with each other, even old enemies:

“That feelings of hatred and vengeance might surface and might be real is undeniable; but they need to be struggled against. For the habit of hatred and the desire for vengeance not only perpetuate the cycles of violence; they also constrict and distort the vision of the hater. And they tempt us to create enemies or to foster new fantasies about our already existing enemies so that we can feel better about ourselves. Most decisively we are called to love enemies because that is what we have experienced as the enemies of God – a love that is capable of transforming enemies into friends.”<sup>20</sup>

Rene Padilla writes of Jesus himself as the peace-maker who brings divided people together: “The messianic peace, Shalom, wrought by Jesus Christ involves not only a new relationship to God but also a relationship between man and his neighbor. Shalom is not a gift that the Lord gives apart from himself; rather, he himself is Shalom (Eph. 2:14), and through his death he has brought all hostility among men to an end.”<sup>21</sup>

**Read Ephesians 2:15**

Jesus has died to create something totally NEW! When Paul writes, “to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,” Barclay observes:

“In Greek there are two words for new. There is *neos* which is new simply in point of time; a thing which is *neos* has come into existence recently, but there may well have been thousands of the same thing in existence before. A pencil produced in the factory this week is *neos*, but there already exist millions exactly like it. There is *kainos* which

<sup>19</sup> Barclay. Galatians and Ephesians, pp. 111-112.

<sup>20</sup> L. Gregory Jones. Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 263.

<sup>21</sup> Rene Padilla, Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 75.

means new in point of *quality*. A thing which is *kainos* is new in the sense that it brings into the world a new quality of thing which did not exist before.”

“The word that Paul uses here is *kainos*; he says that Jesus brings together Jew and Gentile and from them both produces one **NEW** kind of person. This is very interesting and very significant; it is not that Jesus makes all the Jews into Gentiles, or all the Gentiles into Jews; he produces a new kind of person out of both, although they remain Gentiles and Jews. Chrysostom, famous preacher of the early Church, says that it is as if one should melt down a statue of silver and a statue of lead, and the two should come out gold.

**“The unity which Jesus achieves is not achieved by blotting out all racial characteristics; it is achieved by making all men of all nations into Christians.”<sup>22</sup>**

The conclusion? Peace with God through Jesus Christ implies that we will then transfer this peace into our human relationships – no matter how diverse we are from each other. “The unity in Christ produces Christians whose Christianity transcends all their local and racial difference; it produces men who are friends with each other because they are friends with God; it produces men who are one because they meet in the presence of God to whom they all have access.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Read Ephesians 2:19**

This passage describes the “new humanity” that God is creating in the church. Paul describes us as coming together from all of our diverse backgrounds and being built together as “members of God’s household” (*oikos*). The word *oikos* connotes the intimacy of immediate or extended family and household. Paul uses it to cite the inclusion of non-Jews in God’s loving purposes.

“Paul uses two illuminating pictures. He says that the Gentiles are no longer foreigners but full members of the family of God. Paul uses the word *xenos* for foreigner. In every Greek city there were *xenoi* and their life was not easy... The foreigner was always regarded with suspicion and dislike. Paul uses the word *paroikos* for sojourner. The *paroikos* was one step further on. He was a resident alien, a man who had taken up residence in a place but who had never become a naturalized citizen; he paid a tax for the privilege of existing in a land which was not his own. Both the *xenos* and the *paroikos* were always on the fringe. So Paul says to the Gentiles: ‘You are no longer among God’s people on sufferance. You are full members of the family of God.’ We may put this very simply; it is through Jesus that we are at home with God.”<sup>24</sup>

Summarizing this entire Ephesian passage, we observe that through Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile are brought together into “one body.” The reconciling work of Jesus Christ destroys the barrier and breaks down the dividing wall of hostility. In Christ, we are one body, ‘one new humanity.’ How? ‘Through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility’ (Eph. 2:14-16).

<sup>22</sup> Barclay, Galatians and Ephesians, p.116.

<sup>23</sup> Barclay, Galatians and Ephesians, p.117.

<sup>24</sup> Barclay, Galatians and Ephesians, p.118.



Note the two dimensions here. Jewish and Gentile believers are reconciled both to God and to each other. They have joined in a reconciling relationship to Jesus that transcends and destroys their old hostility toward each other. No longer enemies, they are now brothers and sisters.

What then is the mystery of God's plan? It is that in Christ God acts with such redemptive power that he is able to overcome hatreds and heal hostilities. The mystery is not merely that the gospel is preached to Gentiles; it is that through this preaching Gentile believers are now 'heirs together' and 'members of one body.'<sup>25</sup>

### Read Ephesians 4:13-16

"Old believers and new believers, Jewish believers who had seen the salvation of Israel and Hellenistic expatriates who now worshiped *Kyrios Iesous* were part of a single, functioning organic life system. And this was because they were 'in Christ.'" <sup>26</sup>

"Completeness or maturity in Christ can only occur in the midst of our diversity: This in turn [referring to all coming together in Christ (Ephesians 4:13)] brings the church's maturity, 'the very height of Christ's full stature' (Ephesians 4:13). The very height of Christ's full stature is reached only by the coming together of the different cultural entities into the body of Christ. Only 'together,' not on our own, can we reach his full stature."<sup>27</sup>

### Think about it

Answer Box #6

Read Colossians 3:11:

*The Bible tells us to "put on the new self" (Colossians 3:10) and think on heavenly things (Colossians 3:2). Think of ways that these two commands might influence your perspective on breaking down barriers caused by racial or ethnic or economic divisions in your own community.*



learning

### MORE ON COLOSSIANS

Unlike the contemporary church, where we tend to separate the sins of the spirit (anger, malice, greed etc.) and the sins of the flesh (sexual impurity, lust, filthy language, etc.) from sins like racism, ethnocentrism, or partiality, Paul unites all of the sins together as

<sup>25</sup> Howard A. Snyder. *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 54-55.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Walls, *The Ephesian Moment*, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

attitudes and behaviors that are to be replaced with compassion, gentleness, and other fruit of the Spirit. “Racial prejudices and divisions belong to the old man, the worldly culture that we inherited in the flesh. As we become the new humanity, these attitudes – along with anger, rage, slander, and the rest – must be abandoned.”<sup>28</sup>

Paul instructs the Colossians that we are supposed to be ruled by the peace of Christ as members of one body (3:15). Divisions are supposed to be abolished. *Ethnic and national differences are supposed to be abolished.* “Different nations, who either despised or hated each other, were drawn into the one family of the Christian Church. Men of different nationalities, who would have leaped at each other’s throats, sat in peace beside each other at the Table of the Lord.”<sup>29</sup> Kirk illustrates this unity: “When an indigenous Christian leader from northern Argentina was asked what the Gospel had done for his people, he replied that it had enabled them to look the white person fully in the eye.”<sup>30</sup>

*Religious separations are supposed to be abolished.* “It destroyed the barriers that came from ceremonial and ritual. Circumcised and uncircumcised were drawn together in the one fellowship. To a Jew a man of any other nation was unclean; when he became a Christian, every man of every nation became a brother.”<sup>31</sup> *Separations between culture and uncultured are supposed to be abolished.* “The Scythian was the ignorant barbarian of the ancient world; the Greek was the aristocrat of learning. The uncultured and the cultured came together in the Christian Church. The greatest scholar in the world and the simplest son of toil can sit in perfect fellowship in the Church of Christ.”<sup>32</sup> *Distinctions based on class or race are supposed to be abolished.* “The slave and the free man came together in the Church. More than that, in the Early Church it could, and did, happen that the slave was the leader of the Church and the master the humble member. In the presence of God the social distinctions of the world become irrelevant.”<sup>33</sup> In the church, through the reconciling death of Christ on the cross, irreconcilable entities are brought together. Dividing walls of interracial and interethnic hostilities are broken down, and God works to create a new community.

### Think about it

#### Answer Box # 5

*Put yourself in this situation: a person scorned in your culture because of his ethnic, or economic, or educational background has become a Christian. How do you think your Christian fellowship respond if you brought him with you to a community meal?*

*How will they react if you invite him to speak in church and share his testimony?*



**learning**

<sup>28</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 189.

<sup>29</sup> William Barclay. The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians (Louisville, KY: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 156.

<sup>30</sup> J. Andrew Kirk. What Is Mission? Theological Explorations (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> William Barclay. The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, p. 156.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 6

*Think about your own family or any younger Christians you are mentoring. In what ways can you teach your children or grand-children or your disciples that they need to find this “first identity” in Christ? Be as practical and specific as possible.*



**learning**

**Final Assignment**

Final Assignment

*Evaluate your own Christian fellowship to identify all the different cultures or ethnic backgrounds that are present. Now design a worship service that draws on all of these traditions. Incorporate as many of the backgrounds as possible so that people realize that all of their backgrounds can be useful in helping shape the “united diversity” in the Body of Christ.*



**application**

# **Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity**

## ***Unit 12***

### ***Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity in the Future***



## **Development Associates International**

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# Unit 12 – Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity in the Future

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Explain the multi-cultural realities exist in the biblical pictures of heaven
- Memorize the description of the heavenly community in Revelation 7:9
- Discuss the meaning of Andrew Walls’ phrase “*The Ephesian Moment*”

Contrast the biblical picture of heaven with the cultural and ethnic realities of your own Christian community.

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### Introduction

*“The Spirit of God is stirring local congregations to embrace the diverse world that God has brought to it, demonstrating the quality of community for which all humankind hungers. **In fact, the church will have global credibility only to the extent that it has local diversity.**”<sup>1</sup>*

### Think about it

Answer Box #1

Reflect on that quotation and identify which parts you agree with and which parts are debatable in your own mind.



### United Diversity: Jesus Long-Term Vision & Prayer

The Great Commission mandates (as a reflection to the church of the Abrahamic Covenant) send us outward into all the diverse peoples on earth, but this mission is most effective when those who go are themselves an expression of the answer to Jesus' prayer for unity in diversity (John 17).

We referred in an earlier Unit to this often neglected “mission” passage occurring in the high priestly prayer of Jesus. When praying for his disciples and those who would come after them, Jesus twice connects the unity of the Body of Christ with “that the world may know” (John 17:21, 23). Even those who do evaluate this passage as an essential foundation for global mission usually do so only in regards to theological unity. In other words, they assert that theological agreement is the key to our unity. So that if we all agree on certain doctrinal statements, we’ll fulfill Jesus prayer for “unity.”

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<sup>1</sup> Max Stackhouse, Tim Dearborn, and Scott Paeth, eds., The Local Church in a Global Era: Reflections for a New Century (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 213.

While the passage can certainly be interpreted as Jesus call for unity in the essential doctrines related to salvation and diversity in the non-essentials, such an interpretation is too narrow. Erasmus (a Christian historical contemporary with Martin Luther) asserted that the book of Acts demonstrated to the way the early church saw themselves fulfilling the mandates of Jesus. If his teaching is correct, then the unity Jesus prayed for must likewise be connected to the racial and ethnic unity of the church – expanding outward across historical and ethnic barriers, to Samaritans (Acts 8), Africans (Acts 8), and other Gentiles (Acts 10).

The implication, therefore, of Jesus high priestly prayer extends beyond theological unity in diversity. It also calls us to ethnic and racial united diversity as a foundation for mission. We have already seen the example of the Antioch church as a model for mission coming from a church that was itself united in its ethnic and international diversity.

Andrew Kirk connects the passages studied earlier – Ephesians 2:14-22 and Colossians 3:11 – with the witness of the church in the world. He writes:

The overcoming of alienation is to be manifested in the end of hostility between antagonistic groups (Ephesians 2:14-22). Reconciliation does not take place when groups of people merely decide to be friendly with one another, but when they form part of the same community, learning to submit their identity (Colossians 3:11) and forgo their ambitions for the sake of a common goal. ***That is why the Church in mission is both a threat and antidote to nationalisms of all kinds – imagine the radical consequences if the Church took seriously, across all cultural and ethnic boundaries, the command, ‘be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ’ (Ephesians 5:21).<sup>2</sup>***

### Think about it

Answer Box # 2

*Why would the Christian value of unity-in-diversity be a threat to “nationalism of all kinds?” If you and your ministry began to demonstrate this “unity in diversity”, what groups in your own community would be threatened?*



learning

In this context, Philippians 3:20 reminds us that our true citizenship is in heaven. Colossians 3:2 establishes the basis for multi-cultural fellowship by urging us to set our mind on things above. When we come into the family of Christ, we submit our ethnicity and

<sup>2</sup> J. Andrew Kirk. What Is Mission? Theological Explorations (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 35.

heritage to something greater – the purposes of the eternal Kingdom of Christ. As followers of Christ, we affirm that He has become our supreme identity.

Together with diverse people we're on a mission, but we are together as people who have become "foreigners." Miraslov Volf says that to be a child of Abram means that, like the father of our faith, we are on an exodus, a voyage, a pilgrimage, an experience being strange and a stranger in the world. "At the core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty... departure is part and parcel of Christian identity."<sup>3</sup> In other words, by making Christ our supreme identity and making all other identities secondary, we accentuate the fact that – together with these others from all peoples and tribes and ethnicities – we are "aliens and strangers", looking for a new heavenly city (Hebrews 11).

Consider our new "nationality" as citizens of the Kingdom:

"Fundamentally, Christianity is not a territorial religion. The city Christians seek, and the home to which they aspire, is neither a geographical nor a political destination. Curiously, this has enabled Christians to be at home, to be resident aliens, in all sorts of ethnic, linguistic, and political situations; and the translation of the Bible into hundreds of languages has encouraged local forms of Christianity to become deeply rooted in local cultures, while still remaining part of the universal Christian movement."<sup>4</sup>

### Think about it?

Answer Box # 3

*Think about your own Christian life in the culture or society in which you live and work. In what ways does your Christian faith make you feel like an "alien" or a stranger who doesn't belong?*

*How can you tell when you've become too comfortable in your culture and therefore are downplaying your Christian identity?*



**learning**

### Implications for Outreach and Mission

This principle – ethnic and racial united diversity as a foundation for mission – has significant implications in the way we carry the mission of God.

<sup>3</sup> Miroslav Volf. Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Oneness, and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. The Message of Mission (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), p. 152.



*First, it calls us to build for intentional diversity in our Christian relationships and churches.* As Tim Dearborn asserts above, “the church will have global credibility only to the extent that it has local diversity.”<sup>5</sup>

Consider this example: if missionaries from the United States, for example, hope to go to Nigeria to encourage Yoruba Christians to get along with Igbo Christians, these Nigerian believers will look at the churches from which the missionaries have come, and if these churches are still homogenous, one-culture churches, they will have every right to ask, “How can you – living in a church system that still is dominated by racially divided churches – teach us?”

*Second, ethnic and racial united diversity as a foundation for mission will call into question many of the assumptions of the indigenous call for autonomy in our denominations or churches.* The so-called “Three-Self Movement”<sup>6</sup> was designed to release indigenous churches from Western domination and financial control, but Jesus prayer for unity calls us to realize that it is in part contrary to the biblical ideal of inter-dependence. The “Three-Self” movement exalts autonomy at the expense of inter-dependence, and only with mutual interdependence can we affirm ethnic specificity while combating ethnocentrism.

In this regard, it’s worth noting two contemporary issues related to “Three Self” thinking. First, witness the problems experienced by the Korean Church in the contemporary mission movement. The Korean church, which is arguably the greatest living testimony to the autonomous growth potential of the “Three-Self” movement has today one of the strongest missionary sending churches in the world. But across the world, they struggle with inter-cultural teamwork and behavior that is seen as culturally imperialistic by recipients. Why? At least one reason is that the “Three Self” foundation has not adequately prepared them for the inter-dependence reflected in Paul’s description of the church in Galatians, Ephesians, or Colossians.

A second example of the danger of “Three Self” thinking is the church in China. It’s interesting to note that the Communist government generally endorses (even supports) “Three Self” churches. Why? The Chinese government understands that autonomous churches are easier to control or manipulate for their own purposes. A church with multi-national relationships, a global identity, and a sense of multi-cultural interdependence will connect with the larger world and possibly gain ideas and perspectives that a repressive government cannot control.

*Finally, ethnic and racial united diversity as a foundation for mission will call into question the homogenous unit principle.* Although this principle of church planting accurately describes the way that people behave and respond, it falls far short of the biblical ideal. If the church at Antioch had followed the homogeneous unit principle for church planting, Simeon of Niger would have started his own church. The homogeneous unit principle supports a separate church for Greeks, for Jews, for Scythians, and for Barbarians. The Bible affirms a very different goal of bringing diverse people together under one Lord, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Max Stackhouse, Tim Dearborn, and Scott Paeth, eds., *The Local Church in a Global Era*, p. 213.

<sup>6</sup> The “Three-Self Movement” was in part a reaction to the creation of dependency in new churches by the colonial powers whose missionaries had established them. It called churches to be self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating (i.e., able to multiply without outside dependency). Although the intention of the Three-Self Movement was good, it produced a new sense of independence that often communicated “I have no need of you” to churches in other cultures.

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 4

When you think about terms like “world evangelization” or “missions” or “missionaries”, what ideas come to you mind?

If every church is commanded to go into all the world, what challenges will the church in your context face in making the Gospel cross-culturally credible?

**learning****United Diversity: Our Foundation for Long-Term Hope**

Do you ever wonder how heaven looks? If a “heavenly vision” is supposed to motivate us to endure and tolerate hardship, what does this vision look like? Are we all playing harps and using our wings to help us float from cloud to cloud? Is it just a world-without-end choir concert?

The book of Revelation (also called *the Apocalypse*) gives us the clearest vision of heaven, even though it’s filled with symbolic language. Several of the clearest heavenly visions tell us that the work of missions has been accomplished, and the great multi-cultural family of God has come together to celebrate. A multi-cultural writing team described the “City of God” described in Revelation this way: “Far from being a small place only for a chosen few, the redeemed city can accommodate all peoples of the world, with room to spare.”<sup>7</sup>

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 4

What do you understand that the Bible teaches about heaven so that you can say, “This we know for sure about heaven?”

**learning**

<sup>7</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. The Message of Mission, p. 268.

While we work today for the experience of the truly united yet truly ethnically diverse expression of the Body of Christ (submitting all of our ethnocentric tendencies to him), we realize that this is indeed a “moment”, a foreshadowing of the ultimate fulfillment of Revelation 7:9, when the multitude that no one can count – from every nation, tribe, people and language – gather in heavenly worship of Jesus Christ who saves them all.

### Think about it

#### Answer Box # 5

**Bible Study:** In the space below, paraphrase Revelation 5:9-10 in your own words. Here it is in the NIV:

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. (10) You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

- 1) What do these verses teach about the work of Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) Now read Revelation 7:9. What does this tell you about the Christian community in heaven?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Memorize Revelation 7:9 (or 7:9-10)



### bible study

### Before Continuing: Why “White” Robes?

The emphasis on "white" robes may seem offensive to non-Anglos, but readers should note that "white" to the Middle Eastern readers of the Bible had little to do with skin color. Instead, it signified purity and the washing away of sin. The white robes depict the status of the sinner before God, washed clean by the blood of Christ - no matter what the skin color of this global fellowship.

### Our Long-Term Hope

John's great vision of the End Times (Revelation 5:9 and 7:9) provides us with our long-term source of hope. Although our efforts at affirming ethnicity and combating ethnocentrism may be imperfect on this side of eternity, we know that we are working towards a goal that God himself will ultimately bring together the diverse people of the worshippers of Christ in perfect harmony.

It is important to note that the delineations of the world in John's visions – "tribe, language, people, and nation" in Revelation 5:9 and "nation, tribe, people and language" in Revelation 7:9 – ultimately take us back to Genesis 10 and the Table of the Nations.

"In Genesis 10 the population of the world was defined and described by a fourfold formula: according to families, languages, lands, and nations (10:20, 31, NRSV; 10:5 uses the same terms, but in different order). In the Septuagint, the terms for each are *phyle* (family), *glossa* (language), *chora* (territory), and *ethne* (nation)... the Abrahamic promise connects back to this division. Genesis 12:3 states that in Abraham 'all the families [*phyle*] of the earth will be blessed' (the first element in the Genesis 10 fourfold formula) and Genesis 18:18 states that in Abraham 'all nations [*ethne*] on earth will be blessed' (the last element in the four-fold formula)."<sup>8</sup>

Why is it important to note this? It shows us that the man-centered (anthro-centric) global unity that humankind aspired towards which led to God's wrath at the Tower of Babel has now been fulfilled by God, but in Christo-centric (Christ-centered) united diversity. Cultural distinctions are preserved by people brought together because Jesus Christ, through his sacrificial death, has purchased them for God (Revelation 9).

Hays takes it a step further: "The fourfold formula (tribe, language, people, and nation) occurs throughout Revelation, playing an important role in the book. It occurs seven times (5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15), and the sequence order of the four terms is different each time." He goes on to quote another scholar who writes, "In Revelation, four is the number of the world, seven is the number of completeness. The sevenfold use of this fourfold phrase indicates that reference is being made to all the nations of the world. In the symbolic world of Revelation, there could hardly be a more emphatic indication of universalism".<sup>9</sup>

### Think about it

Answer Box # 6

**Expand Your World Vision:** *what does this passage (especially 7:9) say to the church of Jesus Christ today in light of the fact that:*

- *There are over a billion people who have never heard of Jesus Christ?*
- *There are still several thousand languages with no written translation of the Bible?*
- *Whole ethnic groups (what John calls "people" or "tribes") still have no witnessing church?*



**bible study**

<sup>8</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 195.

<sup>9</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, pp. 196-197.

Experts estimate that there are at least 4000 language groups with no Bible translation available and over 10,000 people groups with no vital witness for Christ. Let this heavenly vision of John can serve as an incentive to you to get you praying for people groups, adopting a country, or donating to the work of pioneer evangelism around the world.

### Culture in Heaven?

These texts provoke the obvious question, “will there be cultural distinctions – what we’ve described in the course as “particularity” – in heaven?”

Whatever conclusion we reach, we must affirm that there was something about the people John saw in his vision that distinguished them one from another. We know that they were linguistically different, but the texts imply the potential of differences of dress, skin color, physical features, even worship styles.

“The gospel is very clear with regard to ethnicity. The KINGDOM OF GOD is not a new generic culture, but a family that includes people from a great variety of cultures. The unity of the Christian church has nothing to do with culture, yet it affirms all cultures. Believers are “one” because they love the same Lord and are redeemed by the one Lamb of God. Their unity is the result of the love which they receive as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. In the Body no one culture dominates nor dictates to another Everyone stands humbly before God, in their culture but not of that culture. The culmination of world history will be when the followers of Christ will join the multiethnic choir-out of every tribe and nation and tongue, praising God forever and ever.”<sup>10</sup>

On this matter of the preservation of culture in heaven, many overlook the allusion in Revelation to the accumulation of cultural wealth that is brought into the context of worship in heaven:

“It is not only the ‘righteous deeds of the saints’ that find their way into the life of the eschatological city, but also the *glory and the honor of the nations* (Revelation 21:26). The gates of the city stand open to receive all the cultural wealth of the earth, the products of human labor... God promises not to make ‘all new things’ but, rather, *all things new* (21:5).”<sup>11</sup>

### Think about it

Answer Box # 7

*Think of the best “treasures” of your own culture. What are the best “treasures” of your culture – unique expressions in things like music, art, or other expressions – that you think your culture will bring to the great worship service that John envisioned?*



learning

<sup>10</sup> Donald R. Jacobs, “Ethnicity” in [Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions](#) edited by A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 323.

<sup>11</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra. [The Message of Mission](#), p. 270.

Culture, as God's creation, is itself good. As we know it, culture is tainted by sin, so it's tough for us to see it transferred to heaven. Nevertheless the Johannine visions lead us to anticipate cultural diversity in its purest forms giving glory to God and inviting us to full participation in heaven.

## Two Implications Regarding John's Vision

John defines these people as being from every nation, tribe, tongue and language. Did they carry national flags? Wear native attire? Speak or sing in their mother tongues? We don't know. All that we do know is that they carried their cultural distinction with them into the heavenly worship service. Heaven will not be mono-cultural! John's vision of the multi-cultural people of God united in worship provokes several questions for our Christian organizations, communities, and churches in the "here and now."

*First, the vision gives us a standard against which we can compare our fellowship groups and our personal relationships.* Daniel Hays puts it succinctly (though betraying again his narrow view that Black-White relations is the only racial/ethnic issue facing the North American church):

"We in the Church today need to ask ourselves the question as to why our earthly churches differ so much in composition from the congregations depicted in Revelation. If White churches in North America continue to maintain their ethnic exclusion of other races, particularly Black Americans, are they not clearly moving in a direction that is contrary to the portrayal that John gives us?"<sup>12</sup>

If we look just at the church in the United States, we need to take the initial question a step further than just Black-White relations. If Spanish-speaking people represent a higher percentage of the USA population than Blacks, why is Spanish so seldom used in the Anglo churches? And what about Asian-Americans? Asians represent one of the fastest growing segments of America. Are there Asians in our church leadership?

These are questions that the church in the United States needs to face, but what are the issues related to ethnic diversity and cultural expression in your context? Obviously our answers will be in part affected by the demographics that surround our particular churches, but evaluating our churches against the Johannine vision will at least remind us that heaven will NOT be made up of multitudes of people who look just like us.

*Second, John's vision reminds us that we are part of the global family of God.* The church today is predominantly non-white and non-Western. From the visions recorded in Revelation, Miriam Adeney exhorts readers to embrace diversity because, "We must be multicultural so that we may feel at home in God's future."<sup>13</sup> Hays similarly reminds us:

"It is critical that Christians today visualize the true 'body of Christ' and 'the people of God' correctly. This group is *not* a predominantly White congregation! Christians who gather around the throne of God will rub shoulders with people of all

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<sup>12</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 199.

<sup>13</sup> Miriam Adeney. "Think Globally, Love Locally," Christianity Today (October 22, 2001), pp. 14-15.

... races... The ultimate people of God, as portrayed in Revelation, are multi-ethnic, in fulfillment of God's original intention. We in the Church today need to work toward that ideal as well."<sup>14</sup>

John's vision is ultimately a biblical warning against ethnocentrism and cultural exclusivity:

"The final reality of history, in biblical perspective, is of this new community of peoples from every cultural and racial background worshipping one God and one Savior through one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18, 22; Rev. 7:9ff). The implication of this vision is, first, that the Church dare not risk identifying itself too exclusively with any one culture or nation and, secondly, that one group of Christians may not create barriers against others by the exclusive use of cultural symbols, such as language."<sup>15</sup>

Just as we will know as we are fully known in heaven, so also we'll experience the new humanity in its complete, multi-cultural and unadulterated state.

## In Summary

***United Diversity Sends Us Out in Mission:*** the Great Commission mandates (as a reflection to the church of the Abrahamic Covenant) send us outward into all the diverse peoples on earth, but this mission is most effective when those who go are themselves an expression of the answer to Jesus' prayer for unity in diversity (John 17).

***United Diversity Gives Us Our Foundation for Long-Term Hope:*** while we work today for the experience of the truly united yet truly ethnically diverse expression of the Body of Christ (submitting all of our ethnocentric tendencies to him), we realize that this is indeed a "moment", a foreshadowing of the ultimate fulfillment of Revelation 7:9, when the multitude that no one can count – from every nation, tribe, people and language – gather in heavenly worship of Jesus Christ who saves them all.

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<sup>14</sup> J. Daniel Hays. From Every People and Nation, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup> J. Andrew Kirk. What Is Mission?, p. 79.

## Assignment



application

Final Assignment

1) Write a reflection on this quotation:

*“The Spirit of God is stirring local congregations to embrace the diverse world that God has brought to it, demonstrating the quality of community for which all humankind hungers. **In fact, the church will have global credibility only to the extent that it has local diversity.**”* (Tim Dearborn, quoted in Stackhouse, p. 213)

2) Imagine that you are presenting a proposal to your church’s leadership on making your fellowship a “Revelation 7:9 Community.” What are the implications of this passage for your relationships, your worship, and your proclamation of God’s love to cultures outside our own?

**Action:**

*Look for an opportunity in the next month to worship at church that is ethnically different from your own. Go participate in a worship service with the prayer, “Lord, give me a taste of heaven today.”*

## Readings

### *The Ephesian Moment by Walls*



reading

The following reading is taken from Andrew Walls, “The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History,” *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Orbis, 2002), reprinted for limited classroom use by permission of the Publishers.

#### ***The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History*** **By Andrew Walls**

Christian salvation depends on a historical event: Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate. But that event can only be understood as part of a historical process. Had it been otherwise, the incarnation might have immediately followed the fall, in a single saving action. As it is, we can only understand who Christ is, and why he is so called, by reference to a story covering many centuries. That story includes the emigration of one small clan out of Mesopotamia, the growth and diversification of that clan into tribes in Palestine and Egypt, the gradual solidifying of those tribes into a nation and eventually into a kingdom, the rise and fall and fall and rise of that kingdom and its



eventual collapse. According to the early Christian commentary on this history that we know as the Epistle to the Hebrews, God's self-revelation proceeded over the whole of this period "many times and in many ways," here one aspect of the divine being and activity, there another, until "at the end of these times" God spoke by the Son. That act brought together in visible, personal form all the scattered revelations that had come fragmentarily, "many times and in many ways" (Heb. 1:1-2). God was in no hurry over the incarnation; when the Word became flesh, that event crowned a historical process of redemption that had lasted not just centuries but millennia.

But in crowning the process, God did not wind it up, even if some of those who knew Christ best expected the two events to take place in quick succession. In fact, the historical process of redemption was not finished; and it has so far run for another twenty centuries, and we do not know even now whether we are living in the last days or in the days of the early church. A glimpse of the significance of the process since the incarnation is provided by that same early commentator, the writer to the Hebrews. After summarizing the achievements and the sufferings of the key figures in the story of Israel, all illustrating his theme of faith as the mainstay of the Christian life, he says,

What a record all of these have won by their faith! Yet they did not receive what God had promised, because God had decided on an even better plan for us. His purpose was that only in company with us would they be made perfect. (Heb. 11:39-40).

The significance of Abraham's faith, and the promised reward of that faith, was not clear in Abraham's lifetime. They were not even made clear in the incarnation, when God "spoke" by a Son. They were delayed until they could be shared with "us." By "us" the writer means, of course, that miscellaneous group of early believers in Christ, Jewish and Gentile, to whom he was writing. They were tied into Abraham's story, and Abraham into theirs. *Abraham was waiting for them*. The point about the long catalog of the saints of Israel that makes up Hebrews 11 is that it tells a story that had not finished. The greatest of the heroes of faith would not be "made perfect" until certain events had taken place long after their death. The history of salvation is not completed in any of its exemplary figures, even the greatest of them. The story of Abraham or of Moses is incomplete in itself; even such great figures cannot be complete, "made perfect," without those who follow them.

The same principles must surely apply to the two millennia that have ensued since the letter to the Hebrews was written. "They" – the addressees of the letter for whom Abraham is waiting—have not yet been "made perfect," because they are waiting for us, for the later generations of faith. Abraham is waiting for us, as for them. The whole company of faith between is bound together as part of a single story, a single act of salvation. No part of the story is complete in itself, nor will it ever be. We can see, readily enough, the incompleteness of those who went before, yet we are not the final stage of Christian formation. Others will look at us and see, perhaps with wonder, our incompleteness. His work of salvation is a historical process that stretches out to the end of the age.

And, the end of the age itself is not (as it has sometimes been presented) an act unrelated to the historical process. It is not a sudden act of divine despair that abandons the process on Earth as useless. Such a view would imply that Christ's work of redemption was somehow not enough, that God needs to inaugurate a new act of salvation that involves the equivalent of a celestial

sledgehammer. Equally, the end of the age is not (as presented in some other accounts) a sort of evolution in which the heavenly kingdom grows naturally out of a set of conditions achieved on Earth. It is possible instead to see the end of the age in terms of summary: the completion of the process of "summing up" the work of redemption in Christ. Thus, the Ephesian letter speaks of "the power that is working in us" (i.e., in the midst of the believing community) being the same as the "mighty strength" demonstrated in Christ's resurrection and exaltation. The exalted Christ is thus "given" to the church, and "the church is Christ's body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere" (Eph. 1:19-23).

The theme of the church as Christ's body is crucial to the Ephesian letter. When we think of the church as the body of Christ, we usually think of it as comprehending different races (Jew and Gentile), different lifestyles (Hebraic and Hellenistic), or different people with different gifts and functions in the body. All these aspects are mentioned in the letter. In all these aspects, space is the medium in which the body of Christ functions; its various manifestations are contemporary one with another, representing different social realities at a single point in time. But if the church is Christ's body, then its temporal dimension also has to be taken seriously. The body functions in time as well as in space; time is also an element in which salvation is worked out: its various manifestations across time are necessary for its completion, for "the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere." Christ takes flesh as he is received by faith in various segments of social reality at different periods, as well as in different places. And these different manifestations belong together; they are part of the same story. Salvation is complete only when all the generations of God's people are gathered together, for only then is Christ's humanity complete. By the same token, the church has to be viewed across time. No one single segment of time encapsulates it; the segments belong together. The work of salvation is cross-generational.

Time is valorized by the incarnation, by the fact that the divine Word took flesh in a datable historical setting. The fact that Christ continues to be formed in local Christian communities whose ways of life are quite different from the one in which the incarnation took place means that for Christians, "sacred time" is not confined to the period of the incarnation, but extends to the whole historical process in which the work of salvation goes on, Christ's presence being demonstrated as he is received by faith. The process may be a painful one, as the New Testament makes clear (e.g., Gal. 4:19-20); and the community's actual representation of Christ may sometimes be a misrepresentation. Nevertheless, genuine manifestations of Christ cannot be separated from specific segments of social reality that occur in time.

This creates a characteristically Christian understanding of history. For thousands of years, devout souls in India have sought deliverance from the bondage of history, to escape the continuing tyranny of time and rebirth. Even where deities enter the world for its salvation, it is only for an era; the tyranny of time is reasserted. The illumination that the Buddha received, and that all subsequent Buddhas and Bodhisattvas receive, is outside of history, independent of history, timeless. Even though Muslims share with Christians the sense of a historic revelation, they have a sense of historic closure; obedience to Allah lies in faithful reproduction of conditions that obtained at the time the Qur'an was revealed. For Christians, the historical element is never abandoned, because time is the stuff within which God's saving activity in Christ takes place. And sacred history is never closed off, because that saving activity of Christ continues until its final summing up.

Christian faith, therefore, is necessarily ancestor-conscious, aware of the previous generations of faith. It cannot divinize the ancestors, however, for their continuing significance comes only from God's activity in and towards them. The work salvation is cross-

generational, and never completed in one generation. And the generations—two millennia of them since the incarnation—are parts of a single body, and that body needs them all.

But we must return to the spatial dimension of the body of Christ. Here the different manifestations that make up the body are contemporaneous with one another, and this is the particular theme of the Epistle to the Ephesians. The rhapsodic note in this letter is unmistakable from the opening verses onwards. The "mystery"—the secret now open—is the special place of the Gentile nations in the saving purpose of God (Eph. 3:3-6). In principle, the fact that Gentiles would be saved was not very new, or very secret; Jews had always believed that the other nations would be blessed by means of Israel's Messiah. The novel element, strikingly, indeed devastatingly, demonstrated in the impact of the gospel in the wider Hellenistic Roman world, was the sheer scale of Gentile salvation, the huge significance of the Gentiles' role in the story of Israel.

To understand the rhapsody at this realization, and the stunning nature of the newly discovered "mystery," we must remember the nature of the earliest church. The original Jesus community, led by his own chosen disciples, was as wholly Jewish in their way of life as in their ethnic origin. They kept the law, and delighted in it. They worshiped in the temple, and they loved it, and saw it as their home.' They observed animal sacrifice and the rites of purification (see Acts 21:21-26). This was the way of life Jesus had followed, and he had said that not a jot or tittle would be deleted from the law by his agency, and he had called the temple his Father's house. It was the style of life the apostles had led, and Peter had never eaten anything common or unclean. It was the style of life splendidly demonstrated in the Lord's brother James, leader of the Jerusalem Christians, and widely known in the city as Righteous James, righteous in Jewish terms of heartfelt obedience to the Torah. These people loved God's law, and lived the law the Jesus way. This led them to radical new expressions of that law: they willingly shared their property, for instance, and they shared their meals in the enjoyment of the company of other followers of Jesus.

Then came troubled times and another new departure. Persecution drove many of them out of the city, and some, arriving at metropolitan Antioch, began to share their faith in Jesus with their Greek pagan neighbors. And those Greek pagans responded. After study and discussion, the leaders of the Jesus community agreed that it would be wrong to apply to these people the traditional requirements for Gentiles who wished to enter the community of Israel. These traditional requirements included circumcision, the mark of God's covenant with Israel. Circumcision, however, was no longer to be the gate for believers in Jesus from a Gentile background. Nor were the food laws, or the laws of ritual purity, or the other requirements of the Torah to be enforced for them. The well-trodden way of Thrall had been joyously embraced by all previous believers in Jesus, including the most senior in faith, who had been his personal disciples, and those acknowledged to be closest to his spirit. These new, raw believers, however, were left to find, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a way of life that expressed Jesus under the conditions of Hellenistic society. This was necessary because the new believers were to represent Jesus in Hellenistic Antiochene society. Christ's life was to be demonstrated among Antiochene Hellenistic pagans in intelligible human terms, just as it had once been demonstrated in Palestinian Jewish society. This meant developing a whole new Christian lifestyle for conditions that no previous believer had had to cope with. It meant facing a whole array of situations that simply had not arisen, and could not arise, for any Jerusalem believer—such as, what to do in a pagan friend's house if offered meat that might have been bought from a pagan temple (see 1 Cor. 8:8-13). No Jerusalem believer would be likely ever to have been at a pagan dinner table. Hellenistic former pagan believers would be living in a world that made no allowance for the Sabbath. Many of the

guideposts for Christian living suddenly were removed; Torah and circumcision were gone as parameters for that living. It was necessary, nonetheless, to develop a lifestyle that could function in Hellenistic pagan society and yet display Christ recognizably there for what—and who—he is.

Traditionally, observant Jewish society and Hellenistic pagan society could be viewed as distinct entities, and the distinctiveness of each was marked by the meal table. Jews ate with Jews, Gentiles with Gentiles. The events reflected in Acts 15 produced two distinct Christian lifestyles corresponding to these ethnic and cultural divisions, the one for Jewish society, the other for Hellenistic society. One might expect as a result that these would be two Christian communities, a Jewish church and a Gentile church. The Ephesian letter has not a dream of such an outcome:

In union with him [Christ] *you too are being built together with all the others* to a place where God lives through his Spirit.  
(Eph. 2:22)

Emphatically, there was to be only *one* Christian community. That community had become more diverse as it crossed the cultural frontier with the Hellenistic pagan world; and Christian obedience was tending to increase the diversity by developing parallel lifestyles that would penetrate and influence Jewish society on the one hand and pagan society on the other. But the very diversity was part of the church's unity. The church must be diverse because humanity is diverse; it must be one because Christ is one. Christ is human, and open to humanity in all its diversity; the fullness of his humanity takes in all its diverse cultural forms. The Ephesian letter is not about cultural homogeneity; cultural diversity had already been built into the church by the decision not to enforce the Torah. It is a celebration of the union of irreconcilable entities, the breaking down of the wall of partition, brought about by Christ's death (Eph. 2:13-18). Believers from the different communities are different bricks being used for the construction of a single building—a temple where the One God would live (Eph. 2:19-22).

Then comes a bold change of metaphor: they are different parts of a single body, a body of which Christ is the head, the mind, the brain, under whose control the whole body works and is held together (Eph. 4:15-16). Old believers and new believers, Jewish believers who had seen the salvation of Israel and Hellenistic ex-pagans who now worshiped *Kyrios Iesous*, were part of a single, functioning organic life system. And this was because they were "in Christ"; and Christ, the New Adam, incorporated all human diversity and was manifested in different cultural forms as people who were formed by these cultures put faith in him, and he was formed among them. As the body of Christ is thus built up, "*we shall all come together* to that oneness of our faith and knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13); the coming together of diverse elements from different quarters produces common convictions, a common assurance, about Christ. This in turn brings the church's maturity, "the very height of Christ's full stature" (Eph. 4:13). The very height of Christ's full stature is reached only by the coming together of the different cultural entities into the body of Christ. Only "together," not on our own, can we reach his full stature.

It is usual to see the great celebration of Ephesians 2 in terms of the reconciliation of two races, Jew and Gentile; and the words have in modern times spoken powerfully to situations of racial division. But in their own time these also stood for two cultures; and, in the church, they stood for two contrasting Christian lifestyles. Two lifestyles met at the institution that had once symbolized the ethnic

and cultural division: the meal table. One of the most noticeable features of life in the Jesus community in Jerusalem had been that the followers of Jesus took every opportunity to eat together. Doubtless, the followers of Jesus took the same custom to Antioch, and beyond. But at that point, all the followers of Jesus were Jewish. What was to happen when there were also Gentile followers of Jesus, uncircumcised, following Hellenistic eating patterns? Would it still be the mark of the followers of Jesus that they ate together? The test was the meal table, and clearly, many old believers found it difficult to break the tradition of centuries and sit at table with fellow servants of the Messiah who still bore all the marks of their alien background. What could be defended on grounds of theological principle sometimes demanded great resolution in the face of peer pressure. Thus, Peter can argue from traditional premises for the liberty of Gentile believers (Acts 15:7-11), but find it more convenient not to share a table with them when there was a chance of being observed by his home constituency (Gal. 2:11-14). The shared table was the acid test. It stood for diverse humanity redeemed by Christ and sharing in him.

Each Christian lifestyle, representing a culture converted to Christ, expressed something that the whole body needed. Hellenistic Christianity was not a Torahless soft option for benighted heathen who could do no better, as some Jerusalem believers undoubtedly thought it. Nor was Judaic Christianity a system of legalistic bondage for people who had never known the benefits of a cosmopolitan culture, as some Hellenistic believers may have thought it. Nor was it the case that each was an authentic form of Christian faith complete and valid in itself, apart from the other. Each was necessary to the other, each was necessary to complete and correct the other; for each was an expression of Christ under certain specific conditions, and Christ is humanity completed.

The understanding of Christ—knowing the "full stature"—thus arises from the coming together of the fragmented understandings that occur within the diverse culture-specific segments of humanity where he becomes known. When Ephesians was written, there were only two major cultures represented in the Christian church, the Jewish (reflecting a spectrum of attitudes and accommodation to Greek thought) and the Hellenistic. They could easily have formed separate churches, but that thought does not occur to the author. Two races and two cultures historically separated by the meal table now met at table to share the knowledge of Christ,

The Ephesian moment—the social coming together of people of two cultures to experience Christ—was quite brief. Circumstances—the destruction of the Jewish state in 70 C.E., the scattering of the Jewish church, the sheer success of the mission to the Gentiles—soon made the church monocultural again; and in the eastern Mediterranean the Christian movement became as overwhelmingly Hellenistic as once it had been overwhelmingly Jewish.

But in our own day the Ephesian moment has come again, and come in a richer mode than has ever happened since the first century. Developments over several centuries, reaching a climax in the twentieth, mean that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in the church. Like the old Jerusalem Christians, Western Christians had long grown used to the idea that they were guardians of a "standard" Christianity; also like them, they find themselves in the presence of new expressions of Christianity, and new Christian lifestyles that have developed or are developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to display Christ under the conditions of African, Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Latin American life. And most of the world's Christians are now Africans, Asians, or Latin Americans.

There are two dangers. One lies in an instinctive desire to protect our own version of Christian faith, or even to seek to establish it as the standard, normative one. The other, and perhaps the more seductive in the present condition of Western Christianity, is the

postmodern option: to decide that each of the expressions and versions is equally valid and authentic, and that we are therefore each at liberty to enjoy our own in isolation from all the others.

Neither of these approaches is the Ephesian way. The Ephesian metaphors of the temple and of the body show each of the culture-specific segments as necessary to the body but as incomplete in itself. Only in Christ does completion, fullness, dwell. And Christ's completion, as we have seen, comes from all humanity, from the translation of the life of Jesus into the lifeways of all the world's cultures and subcultures through history. None of us can reach Christ's completeness on our own. We need each other's vision to correct, enlarge, and focus our own; only together are we complete in Christ.

The Ephesian moment is of special importance on two accounts: *theological and economic*.

The purpose of theology is to make or clarify Christian decisions. Theology is about choices; it is the attempt to think in a Christian way. And the need for choice and decision arises from specific settings in life. In this sense, the theological agenda is culturally induced; and the cross-cultural diffusion of Christian faith invariably makes creative theological activity a necessity.

The materials for theology are equally culturally conditioned. They are inevitably the materials at hand in the situation where the occasion for decision has arisen, in interaction with the biblical material. The materials at hand have to be "converted," turned towards Christ, in the process. The classical doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation are largely constructed out of the materials of middle-period Platonism, converted in this way. (Conversion, we must constantly remind ourselves, is about turning *what is already there*; it is more about direction than about content.)

These same classical doctrines of Trinity and incarnation sprang from the need to think in a Christian way about issues that had arisen out of the cross-cultural diffusion of the faith. The first believers were Jews who saw Jesus in terms of Jewish history, tradition, and belief. But when they came to share that faith with Greek-speaking Gentile peoples, they found it was of little use to talk of Jesus as Messiah. The word meant nothing to Greeks, and needed endless explanation. They had to translate, to find a term that told something about Jesus and yet meant something to a Greek pagan. They chose the word *Kyrios*, "Lord," the title that Greek pagans used for their cult divinities (Acts 11:19-21). Jewish believers (and the action was taken by Jewish folk) had long seen the title Messiah as key to the identity of Jesus, the truest expression of his significance. It was a rich term, full of biblical allusions and echoes of the history of Israel and pointers to its ultimate destiny. The transposition of a message about the Messiah to a message about the "Lord Jesus" must have seemed an impoverishment, perhaps a downright distortion. Was it not dangerous to use language that was also used in heathen cults, and that might give the idea that Jesus was one more of the "Lords many" of the eastern Mediterranean? And should Gentile converts be deprived of knowledge about Israel's national savior?

But it turned out that the transposition was enriching without being distorting. Employing a term used of Hellenistic divinities gave a new dimension to thinking about Christ. It also raised questions, some of them awkward, that a Jewish believer, even one knowing Greek well, would be unlikely to ask. Were the question raised of the relationship of the Messiah Jesus to the One God, Jewish believers could readily use a phrase like "Jesus is at the right hand of God." The significance of that statement was well understood by

the Sanhedrin: Stephen's use of it brought him to his death. But a Greek would be puzzled by such a phrase—did it really mean that the transcendent God had a right hand? What Greeks wanted to know was the relationship of that ultimately significant Christ to the Father. Thus, inevitably, the language of *ousin* and *hypostasis* enters. Were Christ and the Father of the same *ousia*? Or different as to *ousia*? Or similar in *ousia*? To find out meant a process of exploring what Christians re-ally believed about their Lord, using the indigenous methods of Greek intellectual discourse. It was a long, painful process, but it issued in an expanded understanding of who Christ is. Christian theology moved on to a new plane when Greek questions were asked about Christ and received Greek answers, using the Greek scriptures. It was a risky, often agonizing business, but it led the church to rich discoveries about Christ that could never have been made using only Jewish categories such as Messiah. Translation did not negate the tradition, but enhanced it. The use of new materials of language and thought, and the related styles and conventions of debate, led to new discoveries about Christ that could not have been made using only the Jewish categories of messiahship. They were not incompatible with those categories. Looking back, all the signals could be seen there in the Scriptures; but only the Greek questions and consequent processes of thought made them explicit. Nor was it necessary to abandon the old Jewish categories: messiahship continues to mean all it ever did. Crossing a cultural frontier led to a creative movement in theology by which we discovered Christ was the eternally begotten Son; but it did not require the old theology to be thrown away, for the eternally begotten Son was also the Messiah of Israel.

Similar developments can be traced in later Christian theology as a result of the gospel crossing other Christian frontiers. It might be shown, for instance, how the classical doctrines of the atonement, and the very feasibility of systematic theology as an exercise, arose from the crossing of the cultural frontier between the Roman world and that of the Western barbarians. It is in this connection that we must see the great southward shift of Christianity that has resulted in the return of the Ephesian moment. The majority of Christians now belong to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These regions will increasingly be the places where Christian decisions and Christian choices will have to be made, where creative theology will become a necessity and where the materials for constructing that theology will be such as have not been used for that purpose before. New questions will be asked about Christ that arise from the endeavors of Christian people to express him, to think in a Christian way, and make Christian choices in settings that have been shaped by the venerable traditions of Africa and Asia. And the materials for constructing theology will be African and Asian, as surely as earlier generations used the materials of Platonism and Roman and customary law. If past experience is anything to go by, this can only enrich the church's understanding of Christ.

The economic implications of the Ephesian moment may profitably be pondered in the light of the United Nations report on population published early in 2001. This deduces that the world's population is increasing by 1.2 percent, or seventy-seven million people, each year, with half that increase coming from six countries: India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. The increase in population growth will be concentrated in countries that are least able to support it. The report projects that by 2050 Africa will have three times the population of Europe, and this despite the anticipated deaths of three hundred million Africans from AIDS by that time. On the other hand, the population in Europe and most other developed countries is projected to fall: in Germany and Japan by 14 percent, in Italy by 25 percent, in Russia and Ukraine by possibly up to 40 percent. This will require migration to maintain economic levels in the developed world; and the prime target for immigration will be the United States, which, with a million new immigrants a

year, will be one of the few developed countries to increase its population. By 2050, U.S. population could rise to four hundred million, but entirely as a result of immigration.

The Ephesian moment, then, brings a church more culturally diverse than it has ever been before; potentially, therefore, nearer to that "full stature of Christ" that belongs to his summing up of humanity. The Ephesian moment announces a church of the poor. Christianity will be mainly the religion of rather poor and very poor peoples, with few gifts to bring except the gospel itself, and the heartlands of the church will include some of the poorest countries on earth. A developed world in which Christians become less prominent will seek to protect its position against the rest. The Ephesian question at the Ephesian moment is whether or not the church in all its diversity will demonstrate its unity by the interactive participation of all its culture-specific segments, the interactive participation that is to be expected in a functioning body. Will the body of Christ be realized or fractured in this new Ephesian moment? Realization will have both theological and economic consequences. Perhaps the African and Asian and Hispanic Christian Diasporas in the West have a special significance in the posing of the Ephesian question, and the United States, with its large community of indigenous believers and growing Christian communities of the Diasporas, may be crucial for the answer that will be given to it.



# Culture, Ethnicity & Diversity

## *Unit 13*

### *Resolutions*



## **Development Associates International**

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# Unit 13 – Resolutions

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## Learning Objectives:

*By the end of this unit, you will be able to...*

- Restate in your own words the concept of “intentionality.”
- Share with others your own five or six concrete resolutions related to personal and ecclesiological intentionality towards diversity within ethnicity.
- Establish concrete objectives for diversity-training in your own relationships well as our obedience to Jesus’ Great Commission
- Establish concrete objectives for diversity-training in the overall training in Christian leadership that you offer your trainees.
- Create your own statement of “my understanding of my ethnic identity under my Supreme identity in Christ”

## Lecture Notes & Workbook

### Introduction and Author Note

Our course is coming to a conclusion. Now it's time for action. Will this course just be an exercise in intellectual learning or in wrestling with the multi-cultural family of God in theory only? Or will it be a life-transforming course that will shape your sense of identity in the “new humanity” that Jesus is building?

The answer to these questions ultimately comes down to one word: INTENTIONALITY. Will you take the initiative to move intentionally towards God’s desired plan for the people of God?

### The Ephesians Moment?

Let’s return to Andrew Walls’ postulate that we are moving into this “Ephesians moment” as part of the long-term outworking of salvation to the end of the age. If he is correct, the topic of this course holds incredible significance because we can be part of the fulfillment of the “day when the Ephesian moment comes again, and comes in a richer mode than has ever happened since the first century. Developments over several centuries, reaching a climax in the twentieth, mean that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in the church.”<sup>1</sup>

With innumerable major cultures in the church, how can we affirm the ethnic specificity of each person and group and yet combat the desire to exalt one group over another? In our journey, how do we avoid the two extremes of which Walls warns us?

On the one hand, how do we avoid the tendency of guarding our cultural version of the Christian faith and seeking to establish it as the norm (a version of theological ethnocentrism)? On the other hand, how do we avoid a post-modern ‘whatever’ approach that validates every individual cultural expression but allows us to remain in isolation from each other (i.e., each has their own cultural meal, but there is no shared table)?

Finally, (and this might be a local issue in your context; it’s certainly a global one) what will be the economic implications of all of this – given that economic might is a powerful but subtle way of exerting an ethnocentrism over others by requiring the submission of their culture through dependency relationships? If Philip Jenkins is correct, the “typical Christian” in the world is often poor. He writes, “If we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian *favela*.”<sup>2</sup> If this assertion is true, how can those who are wealthier build a multi-cultural church of not only many ethnicities, but also of a wide economic range?

Following on this theme, Andrew Walls writes:

“The Ephesian moment also announces a church of the poor. Christianity will be mainly a religion of poor and very poor peoples, with few gifts to bring except the gospel itself, and the heartlands of the church will include some of the poorest countries on earth. A developed world in which Christians become less prominent will seek to protect its position against the rest. The Ephesian question at the Ephesian moment is whether or not the church in all of its diversity will

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Walls, “The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History,” [The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History](#) (Orbis, 2002), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Jenkins. [The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2.

demonstrate its unity by the interactive participation of all of its culture-specific segments, the interactive participation that is to be expected in a functioning body. Will the body of Christ be realized or fractured in this new Ephesian moment? Realization will have both theological and economic consequences. Perhaps the African and Asian and Hispanic Christian diasporas in the West have a special significance in the posing of the Ephesian question, and the United States, with its large community of indigenous believers and growing Christian communities of the diasporas, may be crucial for the answer that will be given to it.”<sup>3</sup>

## Taking Action

Although we’ve had exercises throughout the course designed to help us get involved in crossing ethnic and cultural barriers, now is the time to take long-term action. The trainers at the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students identify six potential responses we can have when trying to achieve unity in diversity in other cultures.<sup>4</sup> Read these over and makes notes as you read – which, if any, of these responses do you think that you might have, your organization might have, or your Christian community might have as you make decisions to cross ethnic/racial barriers:

- **The avoidance or "sidestep" response.** Avoidance of all situations and people of difference whenever possible. A strong desire not to have to deal with differences because of the anxiety or discomfort or fear it produces.
- **The indifferent or "closed eyes" response.** No attempt to understand and/or deal with differences. Attempt to live life as normal. An unwillingness to accept that differences are important and/or even exist.
- **The withdrawal or "flight" response.** "Freezing" with feelings of fearfulness, inadequacy, hopelessness, etc. Movement away from/avoidance of that which is different due to being overwhelmed.
  - inward flight: depression and self-absorption
  - outward flight: leave situation (and people) of difference altogether or create "safe" group within it
- **The rejection or "right" response.** Accentuated irritation, rationalization, unwillingness to change and a clinging to one's own thoughts and ways. Rejection of other's different thoughts and ways repulsion/disgust, bitterness/anger, criticism/fault-finding, complaining, patronizing, stereotyping, derogatory remarks/joking name-calling, trying to change that which is different. Believing that your own thoughts, feelings, and your own way is better and/or right.
- **The abandonment or "going native" response.** Because of a strong desire for security and/or belonging, a person abandons one's own thoughts and ways, blindly accepting and indiscriminately adopting different thoughts and ways.
- **The identification or "incarnational" response.** In the pattern of Jesus, relinquishing one's own thoughts, ways and rights without abandoning Biblical principles or absolutes. Discriminate and purposeful adoption of other's different thoughts and ways. Participation/interaction with the other's different thoughts and ways. Learning through observation, listening, inquiring, etc. Acting in order to build trust, acceptance, respect and to offer loving/selfless service and ministry.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Walls, "The Ephesian Moment", p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from the InterVarsity LINK Handbook, 1999.

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 1

Think over your own responses (prior to this course) to people who were “Other.” Which of the responses listed here most match yours? Try to identify what might have motivated your responses.

**learning****Intentionality**

Very little progress toward unity in diversity, the Ephesian moment, or the ideal of Christians being “one new humanity” without something called intentionality. Whether we’re talking about our interpersonal relationships, our larger network of working relationships, or fellowship in our Christian communities, we need to take initiative. This initiative is called intentionality. Experts on the subject of inter-ethnic reconciliation argue that racial/cultural/ ethnic reconciliation cannot occur unless Christians are intentionally willing to go out of their way to pursue relationships with people who are “Other” them. It’s a decision that needs to be made by the majority culture – to go looking for people who do not “fit” the culture we’re in. And it’s a decision that needs to be made by those in the minority cultures – intentionally pursuing relationships with others so that none of us remain alone.

**Consider this: Mandela story of intentionality.** Read the following story about Nelson Mandela in South Africa. After you read it, try to identify three or four actions taken or attitudes upheld that Mandela did intentionally in order to pursue reconciliation between divided peoples.

In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela documents the key steps in the move to full freedom for all the people of South Africa. While maintaining his dignity and passion for justice, he demonstrated a generosity of spirit that became an essential ingredient in the formation of a new government. While still in prison, Mandela initiated secret meetings with the apartheid government. When some of his African National Congress (ANC) colleagues questioned his willingness to make the first move in pursuing these meetings, Mandela was clear about the importance of taking the first step. He wrote about an interchange with an ANC colleague who opposed the idea: "I replied that if he was not against negotiations in principle, what did it matter who initiated them? What mattered was what they achieved, not how they started. I told Walter that I thought we should move forward with negotiations and not worry about who knocked on the door first."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (NY: Little, Brown, 1994), p. 466

Subsequent events proved Mandela absolutely right. The meetings established a pattern of negotiations that ended in freedom for the black and colored majority of South Africa.

Later in his book Mandela speaks powerfully about what he believes to be essential in relations with others. "I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even in the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to the limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished."<sup>6</sup>

### Think about it

Answer Box # 2

*After you read this story, try to identify three or four actions taken or attitudes upheld that Mandela did intentionally in order to pursue reconciliation between divided peoples.*



learning

### Examples of Intentionality

In the next few pages, you'll read samples of different groups and samples of what needs to go into resolutions or "intentionality" plans. Read these through taking notes on steps out of these examples from which you can learn as you make your own plans.

**Example #1:** this sample is from the manual Becoming an Intentionally Intercultural Church.<sup>7</sup> It describes the steps recommended for a church that has decided to make an effort in Western Canada to reach out to Sikh young people in their own community. They recommend a Seven Stage intentionality plan.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 542.

<sup>7</sup> Rob Brynjolfson and Jonathan Lewis, eds. Becoming an Intentionally Intercultural Church (CD). World Evangelical Alliance Missions Commission, 2004. Available at [www.interculturalchurch.org](http://www.interculturalchurch.org)

**Stage 1: Envision the future**

- Express a “dream” or a vision of the future.
- Paint a mental picture and describe it in words.
- Link it to a time in the future.
- Example: *“Five years from now, we see a thriving youth group that includes thirty second/third generation Sikh-background youth who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ and are growing in their faith and testimony.”*

**Stage 2: Define Your Mission**

- What will you do to make your vision a reality?
- How will you accomplish this vision?
- Begin with a SWOT analysis.

**Stage 3: SWOT Analysis**

- Analyze your “Strengths” and “Weaknesses.” Determine how to use your strengths and overcome weaknesses in the pursuit of your goal.
- Analyze your “Opportunities” and “Threats.” Opportunities include the possibility of addressing felt needs and circumstances God brings your way. Threats, real or imagined, should be dealt with through spiritual warfare and positive actions.

**Stage 4: Write a Clear and Measurable Mission Statement**

*Example: “In order to reach Sikh youth and disciple them we will do the following: offer needs-based ministries to their community, including tutorial help with their children’s schoolwork. We will involve our young people in this ministry and train them to pray for their Sikh friends and be faithful witnesses. We will involve and support persons skilled in Sikh evangelism for training and advice. We will also organize an active, ongoing prayer ministry for this effort.”*

**Stage 5: Engage in a “Reverse Planning” Process**

- Focus on “how” you will achieve your vision.
- Begin with the end goal and work backwards year by year to the present.
- Specify your major objectives and activities year by year.

**Stage 6: Implement the Plan**

- Build commitment for the plan in the whole congregation.
- Assign who will do what and when to carry out the plan.
- Stick to the plan.

**Stage 7: Review and Adjust**

- Is the plan working?
- What can we do to improve it?

**Think about it?****Answer Box # 3**

*Start today: write down one thing you can do in the next 48 hours which will be an action of intentionality towards someone who is “Other” to you. It doesn’t need to be big, but it must be intentionally cross-cultural.*

**learning**

**Example #2:** Paula Harris, writing specifically to the issues of racial relations in campus fellowships on American Universities writes<sup>8</sup> Where do we start?

- Pray... ask God to remind you daily of what you and your people have experienced, showing you what racial hurts you need to forgive. Ask God to remind you what you or your people have done to contribute to racial hurts, and for what you need to be forgiven.
- Confess your sins, to God, and if appropriate, to another Christian.
- Develop a meaningful friendship with a person of a different ethnic group.
- Study what scripture teaches about racial reconciliation. An excellent study guide to start with is Multi-Ethnicity: Six Studies for Individuals or Groups, by Isaac Canales (InterVarsity Press).
- Visit a church from a different ethnic background than your own... Sunday morning is a very segregated time in North America. If you don’t know any, ask people you know from that culture or look in the phone book to find the churches in your own city.
- Get involved in a multi-ethnic mission project, either in a city in North America or overseas.
- Learn more about the history of an ethnic group different from your own.
- Read books about ethnic and racial reconciliation. Spencer Perkins & Chris Rice’s More Than Equals (InterVarsity Press) is a good place to start.
- Seek out other teaching about racial reconciliation.

Share what you have learned with others in your own ethnic group.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.urbana.org/articles.cfm?recordid=11>



**Think about it?**

Answer Box # 4

As a follow up to this course, write down the names of two people in your area whom you think can help teach you in matters of intercultural relations and/or racial reconciliation.

**learning**

**Example #3:** George Yancey, author of One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches<sup>9</sup> (InterVarsity Press, 2003) suggests seven general principles for building multiracial churches (pp. 67 ff). If your primary workplace is not a church or Christian organization, are there principles that you can transfer to your context. Yancey suggests that if a church is going to pursue intentionality in pursuing a more multi-cultural congregation, there must be:

- 1) *Inclusive Worship* – so that “different” people feel accepted. Ideally, he suggests a style that incorporates elements from all groups involved
- 2) *Diverse Leadership*. He says that this is the key because it tells all people that there is representation at the leadership level and the sharing of power.
- 3) *An Overarching Goal*. Multiculturalism does not work as the end in itself; there must be something greater, a great purpose which multiculturalism will serve (like trying to express God’s true global family).
- 4) *Intentionality*: steps to be more diverse must be deliberate because it will not happen by accident.
- 5) *Personal Skills*. Leaders need to be equipped with cross-cultural skills, especially in the area of conflict resolution and the ability to hear both sides and mediate solutions. This, he says, requires great patience and diplomacy.
- 6) *Location*: to be most effective, the place of meeting must be near the people.
- 7) *Adaptability*.

<sup>9</sup> George Yancey, One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches (InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 67ff.

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 5

Assume that you are presenting a case to your Board detailing your objectives for diversity-training in your organization. What would you identify as the “main motivation” (what Yancey calls your “overarching principle”) as to why such diversity is needed?

**learning**

**Example #4:** Douglas Sharp<sup>10</sup> suggests five essential, intentional steps towards reconciliation and a true unity in diversity. We referred to them in an earlier Unit, but they are reproduced again here to provoke your thinking on specific ways that you can be intentional.

- 1) Repentance. Because we all struggle with this and bitterness over past hurt can reemerge, we need to do this over and over again.
- 2) Forgiveness (over and over too).
- 3) Relationships focused on building trust (especially by engaging in each other’s stories, each other’s worlds)
- 4) Demonstrating it in the Church: in other words, actually living out a new sociocultural order. He writes:  
 Gathering ourselves into racially homogenous communities contradicts our new humanity and resists God’s calling; building up ourselves as Christians by appealing consciously or unconsciously to a racial group identity rejects our new humanity and resists God’s empowering; entreating ourselves as Christians by appealing only to those who belong to our racial group subverts our new humanity and resists God’s sending.... Especially in a racist sociocultural order, homogeneous groups do not demonstrate the gospel as the way of living for new humanity. Instead they compromise the discernment and expression of new humanity in Jesus Christ, contribute to the expressivity of racism and thereby help others – whether Christian or not – to make nonsense of Christianity.<sup>11</sup>
- 5) Sociocultural transformation. His sequence is importance. He believes that as the church truly demonstrates the “new humanity” in Christ, it will then be a force to transform the society, speak to the “systems” that stereotype, oppress, and discriminate, and truly become the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Sharp, No Partiality: the Idolatry of Race & the New Humanity (InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 296.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

**Think about it**

Answer Box # 6

*What are two or three systems in your society that could benefit by seeing the united-in-diversity functioning of Christians from many ethnicities working together?*

**learning****Concluding Challenge**

The Bible presents us with three individuals who chose three responses to culture, ethnicity, and relational reconciliation. Jonah ran from an intentional outreach to those who were the “Other.” He struggled with past oppression and present hatred, and as a result he resisted the opportunity to reach out and be God’s messengers to the Ninevites. He even struggled when God had mercy on them because he had hoped that they would all perish in their sins.

After multiple interventions of God, Peter obeyed God and went to those who were “Other” to him, the Gentiles (Acts 10). He even went so far as to go into their homes and share a meal. He proclaimed salvation to them, welcomed them to God’s grace, and defended their faith to others, but he never quite accepted them as equals. In spite of common salvation, they were still the “Other.” He referred to the Gentile/Jewish relationship as “them” and us” (Acts 15:9) and when his memory of God’s common grace had left his memory, he went back to his old culturally exclusive ways, choosing to isolate himself with his Jewish counterparts (Galatians 2:11).

Paul the apostle went to the full extent of intentionality. He reached out to Gentiles (the “Other”), included them on his team, and defended them before cultural exclusivists. At the core of Paul’s behavior was his understanding of the work of Christ on the cross. Jesus’ came to unite us – in spite of all of our cultural and ethnic particularities – as a new household of faith, a new humanity of inclusion, a diverse people living together at peace because we’re together at peace with God.

Now the question is this as you take action on this course:

- Will you be a Jonah? - “To hell with the Ninevites”
- A Peter? - “us and them”
- Or a Paul? – “One new humanity”

## Final Assignment

Final Assignment

Write a personal reflection paper with three basic sections.

- *In section 1, restate in your own words your understanding of the concept of “intentionality.” Then outline five or six concrete resolutions that you will make regarding personal and ecclesiological intentionality towards diversity within ethnicity.*
- *In the second section, draft a three-week diversity-training program for the people in your organization.*
- *In Section three, create your own statement of “my understanding of my ethnic identity under my Supreme identity in Christ”*



### application