

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary  
living.*

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point of cultural time? How shall the man of God, a member of the body of Christ and the fellowship of the spirit, respond meaningfully and with integrity to the Scripture so that he may live a full-orbed kingdom life-style in covenant obedience with the covenant community?' (1977:104).

Hermeneutics, like theology, is therefore the task of the entire people of God, not just the specialist. It is a process which should provide a better understanding of Scripture thereby resulting in fruitful theologizing. No one method of interpretation can be set *a priori* as the Evangelical method. Biblical revelation is a multi-faceted word demanding multi-faceted methods in order to get the proper meaning. Here, as always in theology, the whole church must constantly question and challenge if need be, the findings of the specialist.

## CONCLUSION

Evangelical theology is at a crossroads in Africa today. Left to its present situation it can develop monstrous heresies because of its lack of grappling with the pressing issues. The Bible, at the present a closed book for many, when properly understood is the sure way of rectifying the present mistakes!

Theology, having as its aim the maturing of all God's children, is not a luxury for us. It is a necessity! Theology is the foundation of the Church's life and ministry because it is the communication of knowing God. Theology will help build the Church if the whole Church reflects on God's word in a discipleship posture.

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## The Homogeneous Unit Principle—A Revaluation

*Koinonia, or fellowship, is an essential element of the nature of the Christian Church. It cannot be isolated from the vertical dimension of Latreia, worship. The issues of Koinonia are complex. For example, how would you react, as an educated, well-dressed, middle class Christian, when a dirty, uncouth, evil-smelling villager came and sat next to you in your Sunday morning worship? To take an actual but typical case from India: what did the high caste Brahmin converts do when the low caste untouchables flooded the church spilling out through the door? They literally jumped out through the church windows! Thus, in spite of Jesus' high priestly prayer, 'that they all may be one', the tension between the universal communion of saints and the identity of a local congregation remains unsolved. One answer in recent times has been the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) of the Church Growth movement.*

*A colloquium on the HUP 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 prepared advance papers on the*

*methodological, anthropological, historical, ethical and theological implications of the HUP, and five participants responded; these papers and responses were then debated with a further 25 consultants. The findings of the colloquium are published by the LCWE as Occasional Paper No. 1.*

*At the colloquium, Donald McGavran defined the HUP as a section of society in which all members have some characteristics in common such as geographical, ethnic, linguistic, social, educational, vocational or economical, or a combination of several of these factors. This common characteristic makes them all feel at home with each other, gives them a group identity in terms of 'we', in distinction to 'they'. Following the spirit of Lausanne, the colloquium obviously stressed the evangelistic implications of the HUP.*

*The following articles in the section on Mission and Evangelism reopen the debate on the HUP, not only because of its continued significance, but also because several fresh evaluations of the HUP are now available.*

*Perhaps one of the best exegetical studies relevant to the issue is that of René Padilla, and so we start with his rather substantial criticism of the HUP. This is followed by a new defence by Donald McGavran himself. Then two concrete cases, each exemplifying the issues discussed are appended.*

*We invite our readers to respond with articles or letters to the Editor.*

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# **The Nature and Mission of the Church: The Case for Unity**

C. René Padilla

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Throughout the entire New Testament the oneness of the people of God as a oneness that transcends all outward distinctions is taken for granted. The thought is that with the coming of Jesus Christ all the barriers that divide humankind have been broken down and a new humanity is now taking shape *in* and *through* the church. God's purpose in Jesus Christ includes the oneness of the human race, and that oneness becomes visible in the church. In the first part of this article we shall examine the New Testament teaching on the oneness of the church in which God's purpose to unite all things in Jesus Christ is expressed. In the second part we shall examine the historical unfolding of God's purpose of unity in apostolic times. Finally, in the last part, we shall evaluate Donald McGavran's homogeneous unit principle, according to which 'men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers,'<sup>1</sup> in the light of our previous analysis of scripture teaching and apostolic practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p.108.