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that the apostles approved of adjustments made in order to avoid that charge. They regarded Christian community across cultural barriers, not as an optional blessing to be enjoyed whenever circumstances were favourable to it or as an addendum that could be left out if deemed necessary to make the gospel more palatable, but as *essential to Christian commitment*. They would have readily included any attempt to compromise the unity of the church among those adjustments to which Christianity objects as 'adjustments which violate essential Christian teachings.'³⁸

The analysis above leads us to conclude that the 'Church Growth' emphasis on homogeneous unit churches is in fact directly opposed to the apostolic teaching and practice in relation to the expansion of the church. No missionary methodology can be built without a solid biblical theology of mission as a basis. What can be expected of a missiology that exhibits dozens of books and dissertations dealing with the 'Church Growth' approach, but not one major work on the theology of mission?

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The Priority of Ethnicity

Donald McGavran

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A million Asians live in Great Britain. They are typical of many minorities in other lands. A brief look at the opportunities and problems of their evangelization will illuminate some important principles. We cannot consider the million Asians as a single block. They include dozens of different kinds of Asians: linguistic groups, Hindus, Moslems, Sikhs, secularists, and materialists. Some are educated, some are not. Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, Indians, Singaporeans, Ugandans, Kenyans, South Africans, Trinidadians and so on form tight communities. They regard other groups of Asians with almost as much distance as they do white Britishers. If they are invited to join either white or Asian congregations, their response will be minimal.

If 'Come unto me all you who labour' is to be obeyed, it must be heard as an invitation to remain yourself linguistically and ethnically while following the Lord Jesus. In the New Testament church the greatest growth took place when Jews joined Jewish congregations, Samaritans joined Samaritan congregations, and Cornelius's congregations continued to meet in his distinctly Italian patio. The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household where Peter and his companions were the only Jews among perhaps 50 Italians.

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES WERE MONOETHNIC

³⁸ McGavran, *The Clash between Christianity and Culture*, p.20

The first six chapters of Acts record amazing, explosive growth: three thousand, daily additions, five thousand men, multitudes of both men and women, the number of disciples grew large, etc. (2:41; 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1; 6:7). Luke tells us clearly, 'They spake the word to none but Jews'. Since it took special revelation from God to allow the apostle to baptize Cornelius's whole household and friends, and to lay hands on the believers in Samaria so that they could receive the Holy Spirit, we may be sure that the early multitudes were very largely Jews. For some years Jewish congregations were all they could join; there were no others.

I do not argue that this notable beginning into a one-race church is biblical validation for the fact that much church growth does still take p. 269 place that way. I do plead, however, that it be recognized as a way in which God did bless and has blessed amazingly. The church had to grow strong within one people before it could break over into other peoples, other ethnic and linguistic groups.

The New Testament does not say that Jews joining Jewish congregations was the cause of church growth. Neither do I. The cause was God's grace. The cause was miracles God worked at the hands of the apostles. The cause was the resurrection and the amazing prophesy of the Old Testament that these things would be.

While Christ does certainly call to unity, and we affirm that in Christ there is no Jew, no Greek, we must also affirm ethnicity with equal vigor. The New Testament congregations were strikingly monoethnic. Indeed, the Jewish churches described in the first few chapters of Acts were not only one hundred percent Jewish, they were also strikingly congregations of common people. Very few Pharisees, Sadducees, rulers of the people, or scribes joined the congregations. The record is clear that while the Levites stayed out of the church for a few months, or years, there came a time when they flooded in.

The Levite movement to Christ is a remarkable confirmation of what I am describing as a normal Christian process. No one could be a priest unless he had impeccable Levitical ancestry on both sides of his family for many, many generations. The Levites were as tight a caste as any caste in India. They stayed out of the church till a great many of them could come in, and thus they could continue to marry their sons to Levite girls.

We need to be careful here. The New Testament does not say that after they came in they continued to marry within the caste. It does not say that they stayed out till enough of them were of a mind to become disciples of the Lord, so that they could maintain, within the church, a semi-separate existence. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable that where a great many of the Jews for whom they performed the temple and other rituals had become Christians and were continuing their temple worship, there the way opened for the priests as a class to become Christian.

Paul did not win 'Gentiles in general'. He won Gentiles connected with, related to, friends with, the Gentile proselytes already in the synagogues. The apostles to the Gentiles always went first of all, in every new town, to the synagogue of the Jews. It was there and there only that he would meet the receptive segments of Gentile society, the Gentiles who had become Jews and had multitudes of relatives who liked the high monotheism of the Hebrew faith; but they did not like circumcision and some of the dietary restrictions. p. 270

ETHNICITY THEN BROTHERHOOD

Because the battle for brotherhood is raging so strongly, and Christians are making such heroic efforts to overcome ethnic pride, therefore any recognition of ethnicity meets with considerable and sometimes fierce opposition. 'Any stress on ethnicity,' such Christians

shout 'is segregation and racial pride. Down with it.' These shouts are understandable but mistaken. Down with racism: Yes; down with ethnic pride and exclusiveness: Yes; down with the oppression of subject peoples: Yes, All Christians agree. There is no argument here.

One-people congregations as a rule do tend to feel themselves a separate people and hence easily fall into the sins of ethnic pride and exclusiveness. However, since the only church most people will join is a church of their own kind of people, where they feel at home, where other people talk their language, where the food at church suppers has the right amount of garlic in it, therefore world evangelization and all missionary effort must do two things: first, win people into churches where they feel at home; and second, work in those churches, with plenty of biblical instruction, to promote brotherhood, humility, and welcome for the whole human race.

When people become Christians they do join the one body. They are one in Christ. There can be no argument on this point. But at the same time, linguistic, educational, age, ethnic, and occupational differences do not vanish. Movements to Christ take place along linguistic, class, and ethnic lines. People do not decide first, 'We shall act in a one-hundred percent brotherly fashion,' and then become Christ's followers. Rather, they become Christ's followers and then filled with the Holy Spirit, and commanded by the Scriptures, work their way toward brotherhood—usually much more slowly than we like.

Christianity must hold two truths in equal tension. We must not espouse only one of them. Unity must be the goal; so must ethnicity. Christ did not come to destroy *panta ta ethne*, but to disciple them. Revelation tells us that before the throne will be people from all ethnic units and languages of planet earth with their languages and ethnic distinctions intact.

I spent more than 20 years of my missionary life battling for the rights of the oppressed and disinherited castes. If Christianity is to flow in India and other parts of the world, we must be true to the New Testament pattern of adjustment to the existing social order, while maintaining the fully Christian ideal. We must not overstate the case. We must not insist on full brotherhood at once, achieved in the act of baptism. [p. 271](#)

In the New Testament church, the practice of slavery continued, and women's subordinate position continued. Paul returned a runaway slave, Onesimus, to his master. The runaway slave was a free man in Rome. When he was returned to his master, he was put back into slavery. Paul commands slaves to obey their masters and not to use the fact that in Christ they are equal to justify disobedience. While sticking strictly to the ideal that in Christ we are all brothers, and in Christ there is no slave, no freeman, no Jew, no Gentile, at the same time the apostle Paul made substantial adjustments to the present evil world.

Had the revelation of God commanded slaves to act like freemen, the Christian religion would not have spread like wildfire in the Roman world. Had the Scriptures carried to its logical conclusion the dictum 'no male, no female,' the New Testament church would have had women elders and women apostles. Instead, while maintaining the ideal (the long-range goal), Scripture commands an adjustment sufficient to allow the Christian faith to spread, and Christian churches to multiply in those particular societies. If that happens, ultimately slavery will go and women will be treated as full equals. That is the New Testament pattern.

If we want brotherhood, the surest way to get it is to win hundreds of thousands of men and women from every segment of society as dedicated, Bible-obeying Christians. The Holy Spirit in the heart will impel Christians toward full brotherhood. The New Testament pattern is to insist that Christians put into operation as much of the ideal as possible. They must act in such a way that their unbelieving relatives and friends can hear

Christ's call. But at the same time they must constantly press toward greater and greater practice of love, compassion, brotherhood, equality and mercy.

The Epistle of James illustrates this. In some congregations the wealthy and educated were seated in the good places, and the poor were permitted to stand in the rear. James strongly objects to this. That is exactly the tension in all lands at all times. If you bring in the dirty, unwashed, smelly slaves and seat them with great respect among the well-dressed, bathed, and sweet smelling ladies and gentlemen who attend the church, what will happen? The cultured people will cease coming. Seating the unwashed Christians that way will slam shut the door to the unconverted washed. There is the problem.

The New Testament congregations clearly exhibited the tension. The scriptures say clearly, 'Be brotherly.' They also say clearly, 'Disciple all segments of the human race.' If being 100 percent brotherly keeps a large segment of the population from even hearing [p. 272](#) the gospel, we must find a way round. We must make some adjustment. We must not, of course, practice segregation and let Christianity reinforce racial pride. But equally important, we must keep the door open to men and women where they now are.

For example, if our congregation is made up very largely of coal miners, we must not in the name of brotherhood insist on university professors becoming Christians in that congregation. There must be congregations of factory laborers and other congregations of business executives. In all of them, of course, Christians filled with the Holy Spirit will accept all Christians as equally our brothers and equally entitled to worship in any Christian church. The church for all men and women ought to be a place to feel at home. Since people feel at home among their own kind, the actual outcome of effective evangelism among all segments of the population will be congregations that fit all of these segments. All segments will preach and practice brotherhood.

CONVERSION THEN DISCIPLESHIP

Whether it is coal miners in West Virginia, or university professors in Chicago, or Sikh immigrants in Vancouver, or Maasai tribesmen in Kenya, or Kamma castemen in Andhra State, India, we must do two things: (1) win them to Christ; (2) get them to practice as much of Christ's teachings as possible in the occupation, race, language, economic bracket they were in when Christ called them. We must not place (2) before (1). If we try to do that, we shall find ourselves with very few Christians, and the cause of oneness, justice, and brotherhood will be irreparably damaged. Before we can lead men and women to practice Christian virtues, they must become members of the household of God, followers of Christ, obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The church lives in the real world of many classes and strata of society: young, old, educated, uneducated, rich, poor, Asian, European, high caste, low caste. In that real world it seeks to enroll as thoroughly convinced, believing, obedient followers of Christ as many in each segment of society as possible. The church constantly teaches full purity, full honesty, full compassion, full sharing of one's possessions. But the church (starting with those early churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Greece, and Asia Minor) also continually adjusts to the surrounding world so that the door of salvation may remain open to the rest of each segment of society.

The young in most congregations illustrate this pattern. They are generally treated as a separate class, encouraged to study the Bible as [p. 273](#) young people, play young people's games, sit together, and so on. Despite the fact that in Christ there are no young, no old, they are not forced to live in congregations as if age differences did not exist.

The Asian mosaic in Britain, numbering a million, if it is to be evangelized effectively, must be approached in view of the ethnic realities. Muslim Pakistanis are not going to join

Syrian churches speaking Malayalam, nor will the Syrian churches invite them to do so. Gujarati merchant caste people in London are not going to join congregations made up of Trinidadian Christians, who are descendants of low caste indentured laborers from South India and who have maintained in their congregations a Trinidadian culture and dominance.

Brotherhood will come. Make no mistake, the Lord God Almighty will bring it. Bible-believing and obeying Christians will institute it. But to give the spirit of love and brotherhood the greatest chance, it must flow through congregations of like cultured people. Bright days and great victories lie ahead, if only we hold steadily in mind Christ's command to disciple whole segments of society, whole ethnoses, whole castes, and tribes, and peoples.

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Two Case Histories of Church Growth 1. A Culturally Sensitive Area An interview with Phil Parshall

Jim Reapsome

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Phil Parshall has ministered in a Muslim country for the past 21 years. His book, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (Baker, 1980), drew both praise and criticism. He was praised for suggesting fresh ways to remove Christian cultural barriers standing in the way of reaching Muslims; he was criticized for giving up distinctively Christian positions for the sake of building bridges to Muslims. In this interview with MUSLIM WORLD PULSE he tells of the ongoing struggle to gain acceptance for his views.

One of the criticisms of your approach is that older Muslim converts don't buy it.

Parshall: Those who feel that way have been influenced by traditional churches. They belong to more ingrown types of churches. They are products of *extraction evangelism*, cut off from their own Muslim family and friends. In many instances, they have integrated into a Western influenced Christian ghetto.

What about more recent converts who have not had this kind of traditional Western missionary indoctrination?

Parshall: They have no problems with what we are doing. They are coming out of orthodox Islam. In the last two years we have seen 15 heads of families come to the Lord. We have seen a worshipping group established. The believers have put up a building with their own money on their own property. The leader is the headmaster of the village school. We've made things optional with them. It's not legalistic. There is no conflict with them over such things as the fast, washing before praying, and so on, until they run into