EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 8

Evangelical Review of Theology

are prescribed in the Scriptures. Ancestor worship is an idol worship' (Prof. Lee Jong Yun). 'There have been two kinds of mission policy in Asia, accommodation and transformation. Whereas ancestor worship was tolerated in such countries as India, China and Japan, it was not tolerated in Korea. The first mission policy in Korea was transforming old customs. It rejected wine, tobacco, opium, divination, and ancestor worship. Though ancestor worship is a traditional cultural rite it includes idolatrous elements and cannot be tolerated' (Prof. Kim Myung Hyuk). 'Preparing food and bowing to the deceased parents even without making an ancestral tablet is an obvious idolatry. Jesus himself abolished the Jewish sacrificial system and instituted worship with prayers ... Numerous men of faith have suffered because of this problem of ancestor worship. It would be a disgrace to them if we said that bowing without tablet is not an idolatry' (Prof. Chun Kyung Youn of Hankook Theological Seminary). 'If there is a pastor who says that it is all right to prepare a sacrificial table and bow, he must be lacking in theological foundation' (Rev. Choi Hae II). 'Preparing food and bowing is contradictory to theology and Bible' (Rev. Choi Hoon).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Tradition dies hard. There is even a revival and resurgence of tradition in the third world. Affirmative voices toward tradition and cultural heritage are widely heard both in the theological and political worlds. The Vancouver assembly tried to affirm the Canadian Indian religious traditional spirituality as consonant to Biblical spirituality. Prof. Pyun Sun Whan, a noted Korean liberal theologian and a champion of dialogue with other religions, has recently expressed his affirmative view about ancestor worship in *The Dong-A Ilbo* (December 24, 1983), a widely circulated daily newspaper, as the following: 'Ancestor worship is a social product of a large family system. To express filial piety and perform sacrifices is following the Heaven designated ethics. Ancestor worship is an expression of filial affection, not an idolatry'. Mr. Jin Hee Lee, minister of Cultural Affairs and Information and spokesman of the Korean government, has also exhorted Christian leaders to take a rather affirmative attitude toward Korean culture and proposed a task of 'Koreanization of Christianity' in a public speech to a gathering of Christian leaders on December 16, 1983.

It is time that we evangelicals should be alerted to fully understand the relation between the Christian Gospel and secular culture and to provide clear-cut solutions in concrete situations. We may be doing well if we realize the criticizing, transforming and recreating power and function of the Gospel in various cultures as it has been seen throughout the history of Christianity.

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Dr. Myung Hyuk Kim is professor of Historical Theology in the Hapdong Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Seoul, Korea.

Church Unity Amidst Cultural Diversity A Protestant Problem

David J. Bosch

Reprinted from Missionalia *April 1982 with permission*

The subject of this paper, as formulated, reveals a specifically 'Protestant' problem. In the Roman Catholic Church cultural and ethnic diversity has never really threatened the unity of the Church. The pope as the visible symbol of the unity of the Church, together with the universal use of Latin as the language of the Mass, helped enormously to safeguard global ecclesiastical unity.

In recent years, however, all this has come under increasing pressure. Latin has ceased to be the universal language of the Mass, and Roman Catholic theologians have more and more been emphasizing the need for the inculturation of the faith in each local situation.[1] Tension is beginning to develop between what Rome calls 'local churches' (dioceses or church provinces) and the 'universal church'. Whereas some seem to argue that a wane of romanity may spell the decay of catholicity, others plead eloquently for the autonomy and cultural distinctiveness of 'local' churches.

Whereas the tension between ecclesiastical unity and ethnic diversity is therefore a late comer on the Roman Catholic scene, it has always been at least latently present in Protestantism. Let me mention only *two* reasons for this:

1. At least the *German* Reformation was in some sense also a *people's movement*. Sociologically speaking (I am, for the sake of this argument, putting aside the theological reasons), the success of Luther's reformation can be partly attributed to the fact that for many people it was a symbol of Germanic resistance to Latin domination. The word 'Deutsch' gradually acquired a significance of meaning it had never had before. This anchoring of the Church in the people undoubtedly had merit, yet—as I hope to argue later on—at the same time it contained the seeds of potential danger.

2. Another reason for the higher rating of ethnic distinctiveness in Protestant churches is to be found in the fact that the churches of the Reformation were and still are pre-eminently churches of the *word*. This is already evident in the fact that the pulpit, and not the altar, p. 247 dominates the liturgical centre. In what we may call the 'liturgical' churches, such as the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican communities, the liturgy, rather than the proclaimed word, receives the main emphasis. And liturgy can communicate without its relying exclusively on the intelligibility of the spoken word. Not so, however, where preaching predominates. It has to be *understood*, which means that it has to be preached in a language in which the worshipper is thoroughly at home.

The problem remained latent, however, for at least two centuries after the Reformation. The reason for this was simple: The churches of the Reformation did not get seriously involved in mission work among peoples outside of Europe until the 18th century. In Europe itself, admittedly, the Reformation message was carried from country to country. It is important to point out, however, that no truly transnational denomination developed in those days. What happened, in essence, was that 'national' churches developed, a different church for each country. It is true, of course, that the famous Synod of Dort (1618/19) invited Reformed delegates from Britain, Switzerland and Germany to deliberate with them, but in essence it was a meeting of the *Dutch* church. As a matter of fact, a much earlier synod at Dort (1578) had already discussed the problem of church

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[1] To give only one example: The 1981 Summer Course of the (Roman Catholic) East Asian Pastoral Institute was devoted, in its entirety, to 'Inculturation: Challenge to the Local Church' (see *East Asian Pastoral Review* 18:3, 1981, pp.203–99).

unity and cultural diversity and had decided on separate synods and circuits for Dutch- and French-speaking Christians.[2]

A few small-scale overseas missionary endeavours were indeed launched during the 17th century, mainly by the Dutch and the English. The real history of Protestant missions outside Europe, however, only began in the 18th century, under the auspices of the Halle Pietists and Zinzendorf's Moravians. Their emphasis throughout was on the salvation of *individuals*, or, as Zinzendorf liked to put it, on 'Seelen für das Lamm' (=Souls for the Lamb). Pietism moreover tended to have a rather onesided vertical dimension, with little understanding as regards man's cultural relationships and Christ's universal kingship.

Gradually, however, uneasiness developed over this narrow missionary aim. This manifested itself particularly in German missionary circles, where, during the course of practically the entire 19th century, p. 248 a debate was conducted on the question whether the aim of mission should be 'Einzelbekehrung' (the Pietistic 'conversion of thesanda individual') or 'Volkschristianisierung' (the christianization of a people as an ethnic unit). The emphasis gradually shifted towards the latter. 'People' ('Volk') increasingly became a normative factor in the establishment of younger churches.

In Anglo-Saxon missionary circles this was the time of the 'three selves' of Venn and Anderson: the aim of mission was the founding of self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting churches. Thus Venn and Anderson also moved away from the earlier Pietistic understanding of mission. They shared the Germans' misgivings in this respect. Yet unlike the Germans they did not emphasize culture and ethnicity as constituent factors in the founding of younger churches.

ALL THE NATIONS

Of special interest, in this respect, is the 'Great Commission' in <u>Mt. 28:19–20</u>. This so-called missionary mandate has always played a key role in Protestant missions. In the German debate about the choice between 'Einzelbekehrung' and 'Volkschristianisierung' more and more protagonists of the latter policy began to appeal to the Great Commission. Here Jesus commands his followers to make disciples of *panta ta ethnē*, 'all the nations', which, according to those favouring 'Volkschristianisierung' must surely be interpreted as a charge to found separate ethnic churches.

The best example of this exegesis of *panta ta ethnē* is to be found in the writings of the father of academic missiology, *Gustav Warneck*. In his monumental *Evangelische Missionslehre* he admits that *panta ta ethnē* in the Great Commission has primarily a *religious* connotation: it refers to *Gentiles*, that is, to those nations outside the divine Covenant. He thus concedes that the entire issue regarding 'Einzelbekehrung' and 'Volkschristianisierung' lies outside the scope of the 'Great Commission'.[3] Yet he proceeds to argue in favour of the translation of *ethnē* as 'Völker' (= peoples as ethnic units), 'even if scientific exegesis has raised some not unfounded objections to this translation'.[4] After all, says Warneck, in the practical execution of the missionary commission the *religious*

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[2] Looking at the 1578 ruling from the perspective of the present-day context in the South African Reformed churches, one might easily deduce that the two situations are similar. They are not, however. Individual Dutch- and French-speaking Christians in the Netherlands were free to join congregations of their choice and pastors could be called to any congregation. Structurally, therefore, the Reformed Church was *one*. See my comments on 'kerkverband' towards the end of this article.

[3] G. Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre* III/1 (2nd edition). Gotha: Perthes 1902, pp.247–250.

[4] Ibid., p.251 (my translation).

antithesis in which the *ethnē* stood to Israel became an *ethnographic* one.[5] History thus proves the correctness of the p. 249 suggested translation; moreover, it should be remembered 'that the acts of history are also an exegesis of the Bible, and in the final analysis they speak the decisive word when the theological interpretation remains in dispute'.[6]

Without going into detail, I want to mention that Warneck's exegesis of *panta ta ethnē* dominated the German missiological scene for almost half a century.[7] German missiology showed a remarkable parallel development with German political thinking in general. The concept 'Volk', deeply influenced by Romanticism, was increasingly given a theological weight. For Bruno Gutmann, who worked as a missionary among the Chagga in East Africa, it was difficult to distinguish between a fellow-Christian and a compatriot; through his sharing in the 'urtümliche Bindungen' ('primordial ties') of blood, neighbourhood and age-group the Chagga Christian was sociologically circumscribed. There was therefore an abiding connection between Church and 'Volk'.[8]

Warneck also influenced Afrikaans Reformed missionary thinking, particularly through J. du Plessis' popularization of Warneck's views in his *Wie sal gaan*?, published in 1932.

I shall return to the South African scene a bit later. For the moment I want to draw attention to the fact that Warneck's exegesis of *panta ta ethnē* has recently been revived by the American Church Growth movement led by Donald McGavran of the School of World Mission at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. McGavran, who frequently quotes *panta ta ethnē* untranslated, interprets it as referring to 'the classes, tribes, lineages, and peoples of the earth'.[9] Thus *ethnē* is interpreted purely in an ethnological and sociological sense; Jesus had homogeneous ethnic units of people in mind, 'families of mankind—tongues, tribes, castes, and lineages of man', when he used this expression.[10] Several of McGavran's co-workers, in particular Peter Wagner, concur with his interpretation. As a matter of fact, Wagner finds the homogeneous unit principle not only in Matt. 28:19, but in all of the New Testament. He even believes that there p. 250 were culturally separate homogeneous churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome and Thessalonica.[11]

I am not suggesting that the Church Growth exponents agree in every detail with Warneck, Gutmann and other German missionary thinkers. At a very early stage in the development of the Church Growth philosophy the American missiologist, Harry Boer, cautioned that by 'peoples' McGavran 'did not have in mind an anglicized version of the German conception of "Volk", with its idea of the socially unifying and integrating power that arises from the bonds of common blood and common soil'.[12] We ought to take this

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[5] Ibid., p.250.

[6] Ibid., p.258 (my translation).

[7] J. C. Hoekendijk's study of this aspect in his *Kerk en volk in de duitse zendingswetenschap* (Amsterdam 1948) is still unsurpassed in scope and quality.

[8] Cf. Hoekendijk, op. cit., p.150–152.

[9] D. A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (fully revised). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, p.22.

[10] Ibid., p.56, cf. p.348.

[11] Cf. C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People*. The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America. Atlanta: John Knox, 1979, pp.123–25, 130–31; see also pp.118–19.

[12] H. R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*. London: Lutterworth 1961, p.179; cf. p.169.

caution to heart. McGavran and his colleagues are far more pragmatic than the Germans. Their concern is church growth, and they firmly believe that churches grow more quickly when they are culturally homogeneous. McGavran repeatedly says, 'Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers'.[13] Wagner even finds scriptural proof to support this. The disagreement between Greek- and Aramaic-speaking Christians in Jerusalem, reported in Acts 6, led, according to him, to the establishment of completely separate homogeneous churches in Jerusalem, a decision which, he adds, immediately led to unprecedented church growth, for we read in vs.7, 'The word of God now spread more and more widely; the number of disciples in Jerusalem went on increasing rapidly, and very many of the priests adhered to the Faith' (NEB).[14]

The pragmatism of the Church Growth movement is therefore quite different from the ideologically loaded thinking of earlier German missiology. Nevertheless, some uneasiness remains. The Church Growth exponents have now discovered the German missiologists I referred to earlier, particularly Christian Keysser, whom they applaud enthusiastically. Keysser's major treatise, *Eine Papua-Gemeinde* (first published in 1929), has recently been translated into English and published by the Church Growth movement.[15] And one is left with the question whether McGavran and his co-workers do not in fact agree with Keysser's basic presuppositions, for instance when he states categorically, 'Der Stamm ist zugleich die Christengemeinde' ('The tribe is at the same time the Christian Church').[16] p. 251

We do not have time to investigate thoroughly Warneck's and the Church Growth movement's translation and understanding of *panta ta ethnē* in Mt. 28:19. I have recently attempted such an in-depth inquiry else-where.[17] Suffice it to State here simply that I could not find a single New Testament scholar of repute who supported Warneck's exegesis. As a matter of fact, it is not even entertained as a possibility. All agree that *panta ta ethnē* means essentially the same as *holē hē oikoumenó* ('the whole inhabited world'—Mt. 24:14) or *pasa hē ktisis* ('the entire human world as created by God'—Mk. 16:15). Where New Testament scholars do differ, is on the question whether *panta ta ethnē* refers to 'Gentiles' (non-Jews) only, or to 'nations', *including* the Jews. This is, however, a completely different problem. The issue at stake is theological, not socio-anthropological. 'Jew' and 'Gentile' were in Matthew's time essentially *religious* and not *ethnic* terms. G. Bertram, writing on this period, says, 'Judentum bedeutet nicht Rasse sondern Religion' ('Judaism means not race but religion').[18] Similarly, in the Septuagint and Hellenistic Judaism *ethnē* is to be understood almost exclusively in a religio-ethical sense, as 'Gentiles' or 'pagans', and not in an ethno-sociological sense.

A 'THIRD RACE'

[13] McGavran, op. cit., p.223, and elsewhere.

[14] Cf. Wagner, op. cit., p.123.

[15] C. Keysset, *A People Reborn*. Pasadena: Wm. Carey Library, 1980.

[16] C. Keysser, *Eine Papua-Gemeinde*, 1929, p.235.

[17] See my contribution, 'The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20', in Wilbert Shenk (ed.), *The Study of Church Growth*, to be published shortly by Eerdmans in Grand Rapids.

[18] G. Bertram, Art. *ethnos, ethnikos*, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Vol.2. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1935, p.362.

It is therefore indefensible to equate the tensions in the early Church between Jewish and Gentile Christians with those between different cultural groupings in our day. There is a tendency in some circles today to see the Antiochian question whether Gentile converts should be circumcised or not, as an issue of cultural adaptation or indigenization. However, it had nothing whatsoever to do with the modern homogeneous unit issue. At stake was not the question whether different churches should be established for different cultural groups. The issue at stake was two different understandings of salvation. It was a matter of theology, not of communications theory. Paul and his co-workers passionately contended that the crucified and risen Messiah has superseded the Law as the way of salvation, and therefore, to demand the circumcision of Gentile converts to the Christian faith was, in effect, crucifying Christ anew. Paul still accepted the principle of division of labour as far as the mission to Jews and Gentiles was **P. 252** concerned (cf. Gal. 2:7), but theological (or 'salvation-historical') difference between the two had been abrogated: the Law was a 'tutor' only until Christ came (Gal. 3:24).

As a matter of fact, an unbiased reading of Paul cannot but lead one to the conclusion that his entire theology militates against even the possibility of establishing separate churches for different cultural groups. He pleads unceasingly for the *unity* of the Church made up of *both* Jews and Gentiles. God has made the two one, 'a single new humanity', 'a single body' (Eph. 2:14–16) (NEB). This was the mystery revealed to him, 'that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 3:6 NIV). Paul could never cease to marvel at this new thing that had caught him unawares, as something totally unexpected: The Church is one, indivisible, and it transcends all differences. The sociological impossibility (Hoekendijk) is theologically possible. And so the New Testament describes the Church as first-fruit, as new creation, as the one body of Christ, the 'one new man'. The early Christians called themselves a *triton genos*, a 'third race', next to and transcending the two existing races of Jews and Gentiles, whose enmity was proverbial in the ancient world.[19]

THE ROLE OF CULTURE

All this most certainly does not mean that culture is not to play any rôle in the Church and that cultural differences should not be accommodated.

I have already said that there was a time in the Roman Catholic Church when romanity, symbolized by the universal use of the Latin language, was normative. Today relatively few would still subscribe to that view. Almost everybody now accepts that the Church should be indigenised, or, to use the modern word, 'contextualized'. The Church indeed has to enter the very fabric of a local community, culturally, sociologically, and otherwise. This is the legitimate element in Church Growth missiology and in the views of Warneck and his followers. Particularly in Protestant churches, which purport to be churches of the *word*, the cultural dimension is of very great importance. The Church must do everything in its power to minister effectively and in a relevant way to a particular socio-cultural community. This cannot and may not be faulted.

However, cultural diversity should in no way militate against the p. 253 unity of the Church. Such diversity in fact should serve the unity. It thus belongs to the *well-being* of the Church, whereas unity is part of its *being*. To play the one off against the other is to miss the entire point. Unity and socio-cultural diversity belong to different *orders*. Unity

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[19] Cf. Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries.* New York: Harper & Bros., 1961, p.243.

can be *confessed*. Not so diversity. To elevate cultural diversity to the level of an article of faith is to give culture a positive theological weight which easily makes it into a revelation principle.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCENE

Against this background I now want to look briefly at the situation in South Africa, particularly as regards the Nederduitse Gereformeerde (Dutch Reformed) 'family' of churches.

In October 1981 the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (Dutch Reformed Mission Church) celebrated its first centenary. Perhaps 'celebrated' is the wrong word, for much controversy and even boycotts characterized the centenary festivities of this church that was formed a hundred years ago exclusively for the so-called 'Coloured' people. Later similar separate churches for Black Africans and Indians were formed. Those who opposed the centenary celebrations referred to the DR Mission Church as 'a church born in sin' and as the product of 'sinful intolerance'.[20] To this we have to add that leading figures in the three 'Black' Dutch Reformed Churches have in recent years consistently pleaded for a (re-)unification of all four churches. Various sessions of the General Synod of the 'White' church, however, have expressed very little interest in such a union and have tended to write the whole idea off as being politically motivated. So, as far as the 'White' church is concerned, the idea of union appears to be a dead issue. In fact, many White church members and church councils object even to the presence of occasional Black worshippers in White churches.

How has this state of affairs come about? Without reiterating the entire history—a great deal has been written about this in recent years—I would like simply to highlight a few relevant events and issues.

At an early stage of the Dutch settlement at the Cape it became customary to make special provisions for ministry among the indigenous Khoi-Khoin people as well as the slave population which hailed from Indonesia, Madagascar, and East and West Africa. This was in line with the basic Reformation principle of preaching the gospel in the language of the people. p. 254

At no stage, however, was there even the faintest suggestion of a theological justification for the idea of creating separate congregations—let alone a separate church structure ('kerkverband')—for converts from these groups. Once they became Christians they were to enjoy their privileges as members together with the Dutch Christians.

It is true that, by the beginning of the 19th century, suggestions were made from time to time that Holy Communion should be administered separately to converts from paganism and Islam, yet still within the orbit of the same church affiliation ('kerkverband'). This was, however, rejected. An 1829 resolution of the Cape Town presbytery in this regard is illuminating. It resolved, 'that it is compulsory, according to the teaching of Scripture and the spirit of Christianity, to admit such persons simultaneously with born Christians to the communion table'. The Synod of 1834 endorsed this viewpoint 'as an unalterable axiom founded on the infallible Word of God … and that all Christian congregations and each Christian in particular has to think and act in accordance with it'.[21]

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[20] Quoted in H. C. Hopkins, Die geboorte van die Sendingkerk, *Die Kerkbode*, 23 September 1981, p.7 (translations mine).

[21] Both resolutions quoted in W. J. van der Merwe, *The Development of Missionary Attitudes in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa*. Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1936, p.149.

If we now jump from the 1830s to the second half of the 20th century, we find a completely different climate and type of theological reasoning. In 1951, for instance, the Natal Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk resolved to establish a separate church for Indians, as it was felt that 'according to our policy of apartheid we ought to minister separately to these groups'.[22] In 1974 the General Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk stated, 'The existence of separate Dutch Reformed Church affiliations ('kerkverbande') for the various population groups is recognized as being in accordance with the plurality of church affiliations described in the Bible'.[23] Many similar resolutions over the past 40 years could be quoted.

How does one account for the shift in the past century and a half? It is generally accepted that the turning of the tide can be traced to a fateful resolution of the Synod of 1857. Of course, this resolution must be seen as one among many, as part of an historical process. And yet there is something pivotal about it. The full resolution, in the English translation, reads as follows: 'Synod considers it to be desirable and in accordance with Scripture that our converts from paganism be received and incorporated into existing congregations, wherever p. 255 possible; however, where this practice, because of the weakness of some, constitutes an obstacle to the advancement of Christ's cause among pagans, congregations formed or still to be formed from converts from paganism, should be given the opportunity to enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate place of worship'.[24]

Of importance for our subject is that of the Synod of 1857

(1) confessed that it was 'desirable and in accordance with Scripture' for all to worship together;
(2) did not even remotely consider the possibility of the founding of separate *churches* (denominations);
(3) made some concessions, not because of theological arguments, but 'because of the weakness of some'.

However, since 1857, and particularly in this century, the situation has changed radically. Today, in the view of many Dutch Reformed churchmen, it is considered (a) to be desirable and in accordance with Scripture' that Whites and Blacks *not* worship together, (b) that separate churches (denominations) be established along racial lines, and (c) that the plea in some Dutch Reformed circles for common worship and church union is to be ascribed to the 'weakness of some'! Indeed a volte-face of 180 degrees!

The question is whether this entire development is simply due to an increase in racial prejudice within the circles of the White Dutch Reformed Church during the past century and a half. Many people explain the whole development in those terms. And I believe that there is an undeniable element of truth in this view. It is, however, not the full story.

In two recent articles on the 1981 centenary of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, published in *Die Kerkbode*, the Revd. Charles Hopkins is at pains to prove that racial

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[22] *Acta Synodi*, Natal, 1951, p.148.

[23] *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*. Cape Town/Pretoria: DCR Publishers, 1976, p.82.

[24] In the original Dutch the resolution reads as follows: 'De Synode beschouwt bet wenschelijk en schriftmatig, dat onze ledematen uit de Heidenen in onze bestaande gemeenten opgenomen en ingelijfd worden, overal waar zulks geschieden kan; maar waar deze maatregel, ten gevolge van de zwakheid van sommigen, de bevordering van de zaak van Christus onder de heidenen in den weg zoude staan, de gemeenten uit de heidenen opgericht, of hog op te richten, hare Christelijke voorrechten in een afzonderlijk gebouw of gesticht genieten zal'.

prejudice was not a decisive factor in the creation of a church for the so-called Coloured people.[25] He refers to the crucial rôle played in this regard by the Revd. J. C. Pauw of Wellington, and adds, '… that nobody would ever have suspected the venerable and godly Father Pauw, as he was widely known, of prejudice, uncharitableness and haughtiness toward   p. 256   (Coloured) church members …'.[26] I am fully prepared to accept this and concede that Hopkins has proved his point. Nevertheless, Hopkins has erred in his attempt to gloss over the reality of racial prejudice in his apology.

Be that as it may, the real reason for the creation of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk and of several other ethnic churches in the decades that followed, may indeed not have been racial prejudice but, rather, a weak ecclesiology. The 19th century was, in Protestantism as a whole, not a great century as far as the understanding of the Church was concerned. It was the century of denominationalism, when all kinds of groups broke away and new denominations were spawned. This was true of Church life in Southern Africa as well.

As far as the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk was concerned, two theological currents influenced ecclesiological thinking.

The first one was *Pietism*. The emphasis here was on the individual. The Church as a body is of minor importance. The invisible unity of all believers is paramount. The true Church is therefore also the invisible, not the empirical one.

The second influence was that of *Liberalism*. Here the Church is viewed as a man-made society or *collegium* in which like-minded people can gather of their own free will. If you and your little group do not agree with others, you leave and form your own new denomination. If you do not feel doctrinally at home, even on minor issues, you separate yourself and those who agree with you. Likewise, if there are cultural differences, they become an excuse for the formation of separate denominations. The utility principle thus weighs most heavily.[27]

In this respect W. D. Jonker writes, 'It is a sign of deformation if the Church forgets its own nature and starts thinking and speaking about itself as though it were an ordinary human organization to which the same guidelines of human wisdom apply as is the case with other organizations. It was the typically liberal thinking of the Enlightenment that first led to the idea that the visible form of the Church was of lesser value, so much so that any rules could be made as long as they 'worked' without caring about the indissoluble unity that ought to exist between the invisible, inner being of the Church and its visible   p. 257   form'.[28] Robert Recker, in discussing the Church Growth approach, puts it even more strongly. He warns against 'a growing virus in the body of Christ' that fosters the formation of different denominations 'upon the basis of very questionable distinctives'. He adds, '… When individual believers refuse any longer to entertain the biblical injunction to be reconciled to their brothers but rather simply run off to find some congregation which mirrors their own foibles, fears, suspicions, prejudices, or what not

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[25] Cf. *Die Kerkbode*, issues of 23 Sept. and 30 Sept., 1981.

[26] *Die Kerkbode*, 23 Sept. 1981, p.7.

[27] See further two important contributions in Piet Meiring & H. I. Lederle (eds.), *Die eenheid van die Kerk*, Cape Town: Tafelberg 1979, viz. those by J. J. F. Durand, 'Kerkverband—wese of welwese?' (pp.73–77) and H. I. Lederle, 'Kerkbegrip en kerkreg op die pad na kerklike eenheid' (pp.135–146).

[28] W. D. Jonker, *Die Sendingbepalinge van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Transvaal*. Pietersburg: Studiegroep 'Kerk en Wêreld', 1962, p.19 (my translation).

in the name of feeling 'at home' or comfortable, then something is radically wrong in the body of Christ'.[29]

The acceptable Christian way, so it appears to me, is rather to bear with one another even to the point of suffering, to forfeit some of our efficiency, for the sake of our unity. But this is perhaps a rather negative reason! There is also a far more positive one: To regard our cultural differences as mutual enrichment, as aids to a broadening of our horizons, as object lessons on the richness of the unfolding of God's works among people.

It goes without saying that any specific local congregation should function primarily within the orbit of one cultural context—as long as we do not define that cultural context too narrowly. But it should always be a congregation with open doors, into which people from other cultural backgrounds are welcomed and in which they are made to feel welcome. If a local church closes its doors to other worshippers, it ascribes soteriological significance to cultural distinctiveness and thus falls captive to an ideology.

This is the tendency I discern in the symposium volume *Veelvormigheid en eenheid*, published in 1978.[30] In it F. G. M. Potgieter contends that a people as an ethno-cultural group 'structures' the Church, from which it follows 'that the members of an autonomous church are elected from the ranks of an autonomous nation … It follows further that the boundaries between autonomous churches for all practical purposes coincide with those between nations. History also teaches that a church becomes independent when the nation becomes independent. Our own history confirms this'.[31]

Potgieter goes even further: within the same ethno-cultural grouping p. 258 there is no room for more than one church (denomination) for people sharing the same confession. On the other hand, Christians of the same confession but of different cultural backgrounds should be divided into different denominations.[32] The implication is clear: cultural differences count for more than the sharing of the same confession.

What we find in Potgieter and many other proponents of the idea of separate ethnic churches is a tendency to declare the structural unity of the Church (kerkverband) as something *optional*. That this is the case has been shown clearly by Durand and Lederle in their contributions to the symposium volume on *Die eenheid van die kerk*.[33] They argue cogently that this playing down of structural and institutional unity (kerkverband) is not an outflow of Reformed ecclesiology. Rather, Reformed theology has a high view of the Church and its unity, as can be seen from the classic Reformed confessions (cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 54, and the Belgic Confession, Art. 27). It is stated unambiguously that only faith in Christ and not biological descent or cultural distinctiveness constitutes the precondition of admission to the Church. What we find today in Potgieter and other Reformed exponents of the doctrine of the plurality of ethnic churches is a later development, and as such an aberration.

WHY UNITY?

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[29] R. Recker, in a review of C. Peter Wagner's *Our Kind of People*, in *Calvin Theological Journal* 15:2, Nov. 1980, pp.303–4.

[30] Cf. J. D. Vorster (ed.), *Veelvormigheid en eenheid*. Cape Town: DRC Publishers, 1978.

[31] F. G. M. Potgieter, 'Eenheid en veelvormigheid prinsipieel verantwoord', in J. D. Vorster (ed.), op. cit., p.29.

[32] Cf. op. cit., pp.29–30.

[33] See footnote 27.

Those of us who plead for the re-unification of the four Dutch Reformed Churches, currently separated along racial lines, and for open church doors during the period that negotiations regarding church union are still in process, are often asked *why* we make an issue of these matters. The answer is simple: The breaking down of barriers that separate people is an intrinsic part of the gospel. What is more: it is not merely a *result* of the gospel, allowing us first to group people together in separate, homogeneous churches, in the hope that one day they will reach out beyond their own narrow confines. Experience teaches us that this does not happen; rather, the homogeneous group simply entrenches itself more and more in its sectional church. But more important than experience is the fact that the New Testament teaches us differently. Evangelism as such itself involves a call to be incorporated into a *new* community, an alternative community. As René Padilla puts it, 'It may be true that 'men like to become Christians **P. 259** without crossing barriers' (as McGavran puts it—DJB), but that is irrelevant. Membership in the body of Christ is not a question of likes or dislikes, but a question of incorporation into a new humanity under the lordship of Christ. Whether a person likes it or not, the same act that reconciles one to God *simultaneously* introduces the person into a community where people find their identity in Jesus Christ rather than in their race, culture, social class, or sex …'.[34]

In conclusion: In regard to the subject under discussion and the way it is viewed by the current Dutch Reformed Church leadership, I cannot help sharing Paul's agony in respect to his fellow-Jews. In 2 Cor. 3:14–16 he says that their minds have been made insensitive, for there is a veil that obscures their reading of the Old Covenant. So they cannot see and hear what it really says. I observe a similar veil preventing the Afrikaans Reformed churches from really hearing what the Bible says about the unity of the Church. I say this not in a spirit of judgement, but of shared guilt and of deep concern. Of course, other denominations have *their* limitations and blind spots too, in regard to other central issues of the Gospel. That, however, is not the subject of my paper today. My concern is with a specific blind spot, that of being unable to catch a vision of a church truly transcending the divisions of mankind.

Let me add that I firmly believe that this particular form of blindness is not part of the true Reformed tradition. The Afrikaans Reformed churches have only to return to their own roots to discover that what they now cherish is nothing but a heresy that strikes at the very foundation of the Church. Because of this heresy the Afrikaans Reformed churches have designed a missiology tailor-made 'for churches and institutions whose main function in society is to reinforce the status quo', and where the church becomes little more than a pale reflection of its environment. It is a missiology 'that conceives the People of God as a quotation taken from the surrounding society', instead of one 'that conceives (the Church) as "an embodied question-mark" (John Poulton) that challenges the values of the world'.[35]

In summary, then, I am not suggesting an easy solution to the issue that is the subject matter of this paper. There must be room for cultural distinctivehess in any specific empirical church. People must be able to feel at home in the church, and this includes culturally. But this should never be regarded as something that militates against, let alone p. 260 excludes, the indestructible unity of the Church. This is the danger in the Afrikaans Reformed churches today. Naturally neither should the argument in favour of unity be employed to bulldoze Christians into an amorphous sameness. This was the mistake made in times past by Rome. Rather, let us strive for a gentle yet dynamic tension between the

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[34] C. René Padilla, 'The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 6:1, Jan. 1982, p.24; cf. p.29.

[35] Padilla, op. cit., p.30.

particular and the universal, to the mutual enrichment of all and to the glory of Him who is the Head of his one body, which is the Church.

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Professor D. J. Bosch teaches Missiology at the University of South Africa.

A Letter to the Editor The Homogeneous Unit Principle

Charles R. A. Hoole

The importance of Donald McGavran's article (Oct. '83) lies in its description of an actual situation. But it is not a new situation. Protestant churches have been operating along these lines for a long time. Yet I find McGavran's De Nobili solution totally unacceptable. As René Padilla has shown with clarity, that it is contrary to the New Testament view of Church. In addition, there are sound ethical grounds for rejecting McGavran's recipe.

The De Nobili solution assumes that a believer can continue in faith as a private being, living his life in the quiet chamber of a devotional relationship to God. This faith doesn't have reference to the whole of reality in which the believer finds himself, including that of his work, and of political, social and economic life, where most people experience their real problems of conscience, their conflicts and personal difficulties. The De Nobili solution therefore ignores the liberating significance of the Gospel for all these dimensions of life. Isn't the believer then in danger of succumbing to schizophrenia? As indicated in case history I., the believer must live a life that is divided into two separate compartments. In his private life he will be a believer living, as it were, supernaturally in a kind of superworld. But as a man of the world he will follow the laws of the world. Even if such a precarious balance could be maintained by the practice of 'double morality' (Troeltsch), it remains a highly unsatisfactory solution. There are, however, dangers inherent in this position that leads the believer along the downward path.

Indeed the De Nobili solution had led to all manner of perversions of Christian faith. Are we to be reminded of Karl Barth's characterization of the typical eighteenth century man in Europe as one who was pious at home but hunted slaves abroad? (Barth, Nineteenth century Theology). While allowance should be made for Barth's polemics, the memories of the Nazified 'German Christian' of the Third Reich are too vivid to be forgotten. The 'German Christians' did believe in 'The Priority of Ethnicity'. According to one of their advocates: 'As inner man the Christian acts within the Kingdom of God wholly intent upon fulfilling the morality of the divine goodness, but as secular man he follows in his office the autonomy of the world in pursuing a morality of force and of power'. The product of McGavran's principle in this context is not even a half Christian humanity!

McGavran's attempt to accommodate faith to the structures of the world and its laws, will invariably lead to a pragmatic synthesis; and is therefore a recipe for disaster. As such, it becomes a perversion of true faith.

However, in future missionary strategies, it is the American religion that should be taken as a model for understanding McGavran's Church Growth theory. In an American religious map, faith has to operate in a world defined by the American Way of Life. The