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Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church

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I The Challenge: Migration and Integration

The increased cross-border movement of millions of people, which is a common feature of globalisation, impacts many Western societies and the church in these countries. Since the mid-nineties the United Kingdom, for example, has seen a significant number of both forced and voluntary migrants entering the country.[1] Migrants have been both Christian and non-Christian. Some immigrants were Christians before they came to the UK, others embraced Christianity following their arrival. They face two immediate challenges: integration into British society and establishment in the Christian community.

In June 2006 a conference entitled *Ethnic Churches in Europe—a Baptist Response* looked at the issue of migration and its implications for the mission of Baptist churches in Europe.[2] One of the key questions was: Should churches plant mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic churches? For some churches and mission agencies the answer to that question is a straightforward one. In their report *Mission-shaped Church* the Church of England, for example, encourages its members to plant churches for specific cultural groups,[3] and the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention argues that the planting of ethnic churches is not only an important strategy for today's church but that it is also an approach that was used by the early church. The Mission Board believes that the planting of mono-ethnic churches was at the heart of the apostle Paul's mission strategy.[4] However, the picture presented by Luke in the Book of Acts of both the first Christian churches and Paul's missionary activities seems to suggest that it was the formation of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic churches which dominated the mission of the early church.

II The Jerusalem Church

First century Jerusalem was a multilingual and multi-cultural city. The major languages spoken were Aramaic and Greek. It is estimated that between ten and twenty per cent of the population spoke Greek while the rest used Aramaic or Hebrew in public.[5] In addition, Latin was used by members of the Roman occupation force. The influence of Greek culture on Jerusalem was immense at that time. The city had Greek-speaking schools and synagogues as well as a Greek gymnasium and hippodrome.[6] A great number of its Jewish population had migrated to Jerusalem from all parts of the Roman Empire. Some of these Diaspora Jews had come in their old age so that they could be buried in Jerusalem; others had come as pilgrims for one of the religious feasts and had decided to stay.[7] In other words, first century Palestinian Judaism was significantly Hellenized.[8]

When the very first Christian church started in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, Luke tells us that it was composed of Jewish believers and carried out its mission among Jews only. In Acts 2:5 Luke writes that 'there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven' being present on that day in Jerusalem. Apart from Jewish proselytes (2:10), he does not mention any Gentiles who 'were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages' (2:4). Furthermore, Peter's speeches, which Luke summarises in chapters 2 and 3, are clearly directed at a Jewish audience. Luke mentions that Peter addressed his listeners as 'men of Judea' (2:14), 'Israelites' (2:22, 29; 3:12), and 'brothers' (2:37). While Luke leaves no doubt that the

1 Between 1996 and 2006 0.7 million European Union citizens, 1.75 million Commonwealth citizens and 1.64 million citizens of other foreign countries moved to the United Kingdom. Source: National Statistics, 'Total International Migration (TIM) tables: 1991—latest, 2 series (TIM calendar year)', http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15053, date of access: 25-08-2008.

2 Cf. T. Peck, 'Introductions', in *Ethnic Churches in Europe: A Baptist Response* ed. P.F. Penner (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2006), 9-12 (esp. 10).

3 Church of England Archbishops' Council, *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 107.

4 The Board states: 'Ethnic church planting since its beginnings have strengthened, unified, and drawn solid leaders to start New Testament Churches. Just like the apostle Paul, Ethnic Church Planting has planted cultural churches throughout North America. Paul looked toward places such as Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. Today new exciting ethnic congregations are being planted in Toronto, Miami, San Diego, and Seattle. North American Mission Board, 'Multiplication Team: Ethnic Church Planting', http://sub.namb.net/cp/Multiplication/thinking_ethnic.asp, undated, date of access: 02-04-2007.

5 Cf. M. Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (London: SCM, 1989), 10.

6 Cf. B. Witherington III, *New Testament History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 139.

7 Witherington III, *New Testament History*, 139.

8 Cf. M. Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, 53.

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first Christian church in Jerusalem was made up of Jews alone he does not depict it as a completely homogeneous group.

In chapter 6, verses 1-7 Luke describes a dispute between Hellenists and Hebrews within the Jerusalem church over the distribution of food. Luke tells us that Hellenists complained that their widows 'were being neglected' (2:6). Some scholars believe that the distinction between these two groups was simply one of language: Hellenists were Greek-speaking believers while Hebrews spoke Aramaic as their mother tongue.[9] According to Witherington, Hellenists spoke Greek only, while some of the Aramaic-speaking Hebrews also had some command of Greek.[10] F.F. Bruce even argues that many of the Aramaic-speaking Jews were bilingual.[11] Other commentators hold that there were also theological differences between the two groups. They believe that the Hellenists were more mission-minded than the Hebrews and that both interpreted the law in different ways, with the Hellenists following Jesus' teaching.[12]

However, Luke neither mentions language problems nor a division between theologically and ethically liberal Hellenists and conservative Hebrews as the cause of the dispute. In verse 1 he indicates that the reason for ignoring the Hellenist widows was more of a logistic nature: the increasing number of believers. By naming the particular group among the Hellenists who were being ignored, i.e. 'their widows' and writing that the apostles 'called together the whole community' to solve the problem Luke also indicates that Hellenists and Hebrews had their own social meetings. In other words, this practice of holding separate gatherings was another reason for neglecting the Hellenist widows.

The existence of such separate Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking Christian meetings in Jerusalem is also argued by Williams and Dunn. While Williams talks about a 'Greek-speaking Christian community' that formed a minority in an overwhelmingly Hebrew church,[13] Dunn prefers to use the term 'Hellenistic house churches' for the Greek-speaking gatherings.[14] Hertig notes that the relationship between these two groups was not free of any tensions. 'The numerical growth of the minority group', she writes, 'sharpened group consciousness and thus resulted in intergroup tension, particularly when resources were limited.'[15]

9 E.g. O. Bauernfeind, *Kommentar und Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 103; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 347; J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 216; L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 105.

10 Witherington III, *New Testament History*, 180.

11 F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 181.

12 Cf. G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte I. Teil* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 414-415.

13 D.J. Williams, *Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 118.

14 J.D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), 84.

15 Y.L. Hertig, 'Cross-cultural Mediation: From Exclusion to Inclusion', in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narrative in Contemporary Context*, eds. R.L. Gallagher and P. Hertig (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 59-72 (esp. 65).

These tensions, she argues, can be traced back to the rift between Hebrews and Hellenists that started with the attempts of the latter to transform Jerusalem into a Greek city in the second century B.C.[16]

However, it is striking that Luke does not mention any further conflicts between Hellenists and Hebrews in the Jerusalem church in later parts of Acts. Neither does chapter 6 paint the picture of a Jerusalem church that was divided into two independent hostile communities, factions or parties. On the contrary, Luke presents the dispute over the food distribution as a 'one-off' incident that was dealt with immediately. He tells us that in response to the complaints made by the Hellenists, the twelve apostles called together the assembly of Christians in Jerusalem, in order to sort out the issue (6:2). They then suggest choosing seven men for the distribution of food among the Greek-speaking widows. The selection of the candidates is left to the community (6:3), while the apostles regard it as their task to commission the chosen candidates (6:6).

Luke emphasises that the problem of the food distribution was a matter for the whole Christian church, and not one of the Greek-speaking group alone. Fernando notes: 'The solution of the problem facing the church was not to divide and have separate churches—one for the Grecians and another for the Hebraists. Rather, they sought to ensure that the Grecians were cared for.'[17] Luke also stresses that the issue was not only dealt with immediately but also in a sensitive way. Thus, Luke deliberately lists the seven men chosen who all have Greek names (cf. 6:5). By listing the Greek names he indicates that they were all members of the Hellenist group and that their selection was an attempt to appease the Hellenists. Some scholars, however, argue that the Greek names cannot be taken as a clear proof that the seven men were all drawn from the Hellenist section of the church, since many Palestinian Jews of that period had Greek names.[18] While this is true, these scholars overlook the fact that most of these Greek names were quite uncommon names for Palestinian Jews.[19] They also seem to forget that it was quite natural for the seven to be from the Greek-speaking section as they were appointed to serve that very group.[20]

To summarise, one can say that Luke presents the early Christian church in Jerusalem as a diverse mono-ethnic community. The church consisted of an Aramaic-speaking majority and a Greek-speaking minority. These two groups had their own meetings but they accepted the overall leadership of the apostles. Luke stresses that the church leaders showed sincere concern for the needs of the minority group

16 Hertig, 'Cross-cultural Mediation: From Exclusion to Inclusion', 65.

17 A. Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 230.

18 E.g. J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 57.

19 Cf. I.H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 127.

20 Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1990), 183.

and the unity of the church. He also emphasises that they were flexible enough to restructure the community and to give leadership responsibilities to members of the minority group when it became necessary. Luke's account of the beginning of the Jerusalem church suggests that the Greek-speaking minority were fully integrated into the church: they had a voice in the assembly and Luke does not mention any attempts made by the Aramaic-speaking majority to demand cultural or linguistic assimilation.

The overall picture of the early Jerusalem church, presented by the author of Acts, is that of a caring community united by faith. This fits well with the main theological purposes of Luke, i.e. to strengthen the faith of his Christian readership and to encourage them to get on with their mission, which is to all people whatever social or ethnic background they might have.

III The Church in Antioch

In the first century A.D. Antioch was not only the capital of the Roman province of Syria, but also the third-largest city of the Roman Empire, next to Rome and Alexandria.[21] The estimates of Antioch's population size vary between 100,000 people, set by modern historians, and 600,000, as some ancient sources suggest.[22] Antioch was a free city and attracted people from many different cultures.[23] The inhabitants of Antioch were Greeks, Macedonians, Syrians and Jews, the latter being mostly veterans of the army of Seceulus. Antioch was what today we would call a global city.

In the Book of Acts Luke emphasizes that the multi-ethnic character of the city of Antioch was reflected both in the composition of its first Christian church and in the church's leadership. In chapter 11, verses 19 to 21 Luke tells his readers how the church in Antioch was established by members of the Jerusalem church who had fled from the persecution that had broken out after the death of Stephen. In Antioch they started to evangelise Jews only (11:19), but then some of them began to preach the gospel to members of the Hellenist population also (11:20). By identifying these early evangelists as 'men of Cyprus and Cyrene', i.e. Greek-speaking Jewish believers in Christ, Luke makes clear that he is using the term 'Hellenists' not in the sense of Acts 6:1. While in 6:1 'Hellenists' stand for Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, here it refers to 'the non-Jewish, Greek-speaking inhabitants of Antioch'.[24]

Bruce believes that some of these new Greek-speaking disciples of non-Jewish origin might have been God-fearers, i.e., Gentiles who had attended the Jewish synagogue and therefore already had some knowledge of the Jewish faith.[25] Other scholars hold that

21 Cf. T.C. Smith, 'Antioch', in *Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible*, gen. ed. W.E.Mills (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1994) 34-35 (esp. 34).

22 Cf. F.W. Norris, 'Antioch of Syria', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, gen. ed. D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 265-269 (esp. 265).

23 Cf. Smith, 'Antioch', 35.

24 C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles, Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 550-551.

25 F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 225.

the majority of these new converts belonged to that class.[26] Jervell thinks that they were all God-fearers.[27] Luke, however, does not give us more information about their background. To him it seems to be more important to stress that the evangelism among the Greek-speaking gentile population of Antioch was very successful. In verse 21 he writes: 'The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord'.

In Acts 13:1 Luke shows that the leadership group of the new Christian church in Antioch was as diverse as the church itself. Thus, he mentions that it was served by prophets and teachers, and, as before in Acts 6:5, he gives a list with the names of the men concerned: 'Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul'. By listing the names of these church leaders Luke highlights the wide range of both their social and cultural backgrounds.

Barnabas, whom he mentions first, was a Jewish Cypriot, who had sold his property and given the proceeds to the church in Jerusalem (4:36-37). He had been sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem church in order to establish a relationship with the new believers (11:22-23). Simeon is a Jewish name that also appears in Acts 15:14 as the Jewish name of the apostle Peter, while the nickname Niger is Latin and means black or dark-complexioned. Lucius was a very common Latin name in the Roman world.[28] There is no evidence that this Lucius is identical with the Lucius of Romans 16:21. However, Luke tells us that he was from Cyrene, a city on the northern coast of Africa. The next name in the list is Manaen, which is the Greek version of the Hebrew Menahem meaning comforter.[29] According to Luke, Manaen had been brought up with Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, the ruler of Galilee during Jesus' ministry. The last person that Luke mentions is Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, who has been recruited as an assistant and brought to Antioch by Barnabas (9:11; 11:25-26).

After listing the names of the church leaders in Antioch, Luke gives an account of the call and commissioning of Saul and Barnabas as the first missionaries of the Antiochene church (13:2-3). Thus, he indicates that the multi-cultural church of Antioch became not only the sponsoring church for their missionary activities but also the church model that the two missionaries sought to replicate in other cities of the Roman Empire.[30]

IV The Philippian Church

It was the Roman emperor Octavian who made the Macedonian city of Philippi a Roman colony after his victory over the army of Cassius and Brutus in 42 B.C.[31] By the time Paul and

26 E.g. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 154.

27 Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 322.

28 Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 45.

29 Cf. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 497.

30 Cf. P.H. Towner, 'Mission Practice and Theology under Construction (Acts 18-20)', in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* eds. I.H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 417-436 (esp. 422).

31 Cf. T.C. Smith, 'Philippi', in *Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible*, gen. ed. W.E.Mills (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1994) 683-684 (esp. 684).

Silas came to the city in 49 A.D. its population was made up of Romans, who had been encouraged to settle there, and the Greek-speaking Thracians, descendents from the settlers brought in by Philip II, king of Macedonia. Although Latin was the official language in Philippi, it was Greek that dominated both business and everyday life.[32]

In Acts 16 we are told by Luke how the first church on the European continent was founded by Paul and Silas, and again Luke points to the social and ethnic diversity of the Christian church. Thus, he describes in detail the conversions of a woman named Lydia and her household (16:13-15), as well as those of a jailer and his family (16:23-34). The name of Lydia, the first convert in Philippi, corresponds to the name of her home country.[33] Lydia was an immigrant from Thyatira (16:14), a city in Lydia which was part of the Roman province of Asia Minor. Luke also tells us that she was a 'worshipper of God' (16:14), i.e. a Gentile attracted to the Jewish religion. Furthermore, he mentions that Lydia was 'a dealer in purple cloth' (16:14), indicating that she was a well-to-do woman. Conzelmann points out that Thyatira was famous for its dyeing industry,[34] and Williams writes: 'It was a luxury trade, and Lydia must have been a relatively wealthy woman to be engaged in it'.[35] By giving so much information about her and quoting her invitation to Paul and Silas to stay in her house (16:15), Luke seems to suggest that she became a leading figure in the Philippian church.

The jailer's social and national status is in contrast to Lydia and is representative of a completely different subgroup of Philippian society. As a prison guard he was part of the Roman administration and probably a Roman himself.[36] In a city that was distinctly Roman he typified Roman culture and society. As a jailer he was either an active or a retired soldier of the Roman army.[37] Thus, Luke emphasises that he was quick to follow instructions from the magistrates (16:24), and determined to commit suicide at the prospect of allowing his prisoners to escape (16:27). These reactions reveal a Roman soldier's sense of duty and discipline. The same is true for his short and straightforward question: 'Sirs, must I do to be saved?' which Luke mentions in verse 30, and the fact that 'he and his entire family were baptised without delay' after their conversions (16:33).

Whether the slave girl belonged to the founding members of the church in Philippi is debatable. On the one hand, Luke does not mention her baptism as he does in the case of Lydia (16:15) and the jailer (16:33), or her presence in Lydia's home when Paul and Silas said their farewells to the new believers (16:40). Neither is it clear if her proclamation in 16:17 can be taken as a true confession of faith. While the title "Most High God" (*hypsistos theos*) is also used in Acts 7:48 and in Luke's Gospel (1:32, 35, 76; 6:35; 8:28; 19:38), Luke stresses that Paul was annoyed with the girl's behaviour (16:18). Trebilco suggests that the apostle was angry with her because '[she] was proclaiming that the way of salvation was found in which ever god the hearer considered to be 'the highest god'.'[38] On the other hand, Luke tells us that the girl's deliverance from an evil spirit took place between Lydia's conversion and the jailer's conversion. Stott argues that this allows the conclusion that she became a member of the church too.[39]

In sum, the core group of the church in Philippi is portrayed by Luke as a very diverse community. Luke stresses that they had not only been brought up in different cultures but also belonged to different social classes. Whether or not the slave girl was among the first Christians in Philippi, Luke presents the church as a multi-ethnic community.

V Other Pauline Churches

According to Luke, a similar ethnic, cultural and social mix could be found in the churches that were set up by Paul and Silas in Thessalonica, Beroea, and Corinth. In Acts 17:4 he informs us that the first Christian congregation in Thessalonica was composed of Jews, a great number of God-fearing Gentiles and a considerable number of leading Macedonian women. In 17:12 he mentions that the new Christian church in Beroea included a larger group of Jews and some Greek women and men.

Finally, in chapter 18 Luke goes to great length showing that the foundational members of the church in Corinth were of a diverse background too. Thus, he mentions not only Aquila and Priscilla, both Jewish refugees from Italy, who had been forced to leave Rome by an order of the Emperor Claudius (18:2), but also Titius Justus, a gentile God-fearer (18:7). As Titius Justus is a Roman name it is quite possible, as Barrett writes, that he was also a Roman citizen.[40] The next person in the list is Crispus, a Jewish synagogue official who together with his household became a believer (18:8). The lists ends with 'many Corinthians' who 'became believers and were baptized' (18:8), and with the promise that many more will come to faith in city of Corinth (18:10).

VI Paul's Multi-Ethnic Mission Teams

Finally, it is noteworthy that Luke not

32 G.D. Fee, *Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 26.

33 Cf. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 585.

34 H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Limburg, A.T. Kraabel and D.H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 130.

35 Williams, *Acts*, 282.

36 Cf. D.L. Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 156.

37 Cf. B. Rapske, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting: Vol. 3: The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 252-253.

38 P.R. Trebilco, 'Paul and Silas—'Servants of the Most High God' (Acts 16:16-18)', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (1989) 36, 51-73 (esp. 62).

39 J.R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 265.

40 Cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles, Vol. 2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 868.

only portrays the first Christian churches as multi-cultural and multi-ethnic communities, but that he also depicts Paul's missionary teams as culturally and ethnically diverse. Luke informs us that on his first journey Paul, originally from Tarsus, travelled together with Barnabas, 'a Levite' and 'a native of Cyprus' (4:36).

After Paul and Barnabas' split over John Mark (15:36-39), Paul continued his work with Silas (15:40), a member and prophet of the Jerusalem church (15:22, 32) and, like Paul, a Roman citizen (16:37), before they were joined by Timothy from Lystra, the son of a Greek father and a Jewish-Christian mother (16:1). Luke goes on to tell us that on his third missionary journey Paul recruited the Italian couple Aquila and Priscilla, who went with him to Antioch and Ephesus (Acts 18:1-28). In Ephesus Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew and evangelist who needed some further instruction in the 'Way of God' (18:24-26). In 19:22 the author of Acts informs his readers that during his stay in Ephesus Paul also sent a helper named Erastus together with Timothy to Macedonia. According to McRay this Erastus is identical with the Roman city treasurer of Corinth mentioned in Romans 16:23 and 2 Timothy 4:20.[41] However, Luke does not give us any further information about him.

VII The Antioch Crisis and the Jerusalem Council

According to Luke, Paul and Barnabas' multi-cultural mission in places like Cyprus, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, and Derbe was very successful (cf. 13:4-14:21). Luke stresses that both Jews and Gentiles found faith in Christ as a result of the missionaries' work. Thus, he mentions Sergius Paulus, a Roman proconsul, who became a Christian in Cyprus (13:12), and writes that 'a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers' in Iconium (14:1). However, with the missionaries' successful evangelism among Gentiles problems of membership and integration began to arise.[42]

In Acts 15:1 Luke describes the intervention of a group of Christians who came to Antioch from Judea insisting that male Christians had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Luke underlines that a policy existed at Antioch that non-Jewish believers were not required to keep the Jewish law.[43] Thus, he mentions that both Paul and Barnabas 'had no small dissension and debate' with those Judeans (15:2). It is obvious that Luke identifies with Paul and Barnabas' position. He does not mention the names of their opponents but describes them only as 'certain individuals' from Judea (15:1). Furthermore, he writes that the news of gentile converts 'brought great joy' to the believers in Phoenicia and Samaria (15:4).

In Acts 15:5-29 Luke gives a detailed account of the Council of

41 J. McRay, *Paul: His Life and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 167-168.

42 Cf. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 242.

43 Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 242.

Jerusalem which was summoned in order to discuss the issues of circumcision and incorporation into the church.[44] It is not by chance that Luke's account of the Jerusalem meeting can be found in the middle of Acts.[45] For Luke the council is a central event in the history of the early church. In verse 5 he tells us that in Jerusalem the demand of circumcision was repeated by a group of believers of Pharisaic background. Bauernfeind argues that the demands for circumcision in verses 2 and 5 put the relationship between circumcised and uncircumcised believers at risk.[46]

However, Luke does not say anything about a split over the issue in the church in Antioch. There was dissension caused by the visit of Christians from Judea, and all those actively involved in the debate were Jewish Christians. The same is true for the meeting in Jerusalem. The participants he mentions by name, i.e. Paul, Barnabas, Peter and James, are all Jewish believers in Christ. Moreover, Luke leaves no doubt that the speeches of the apostles, which he summarises, were addressed to Jewish Christians (cf. 15:10, 12, 19). Consequently, the conflict was not between gentile and Jewish believers but between Jewish Christians only.

Still, Luke makes very clear that the dissatisfaction over the practice of welcoming gentile converts into the church by baptism without circumcision was potentially dangerous to the church's unity and mission and that a solution needed to be found. Luke lets his readers know that the mission among the Gentiles was not only God's will but also God's mission. Thus, he quotes Peter who reminded the meeting that 'in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of good news and become believers' (15:7). Luke also summarises the main point of Paul and Barnabas' speeches, i.e. that it was God who had done all the signs and wonders through them among the Gentiles (15:12). By quoting Peter's statements that gentile and Jewish believers have been give the same Holy Spirit (15:8), that there is 'no distinction' between them (15:9), and that both 'will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus' (15:11) Luke assures his readers that all believers are equal in Christ. Consequently, no one can demand from gentile Christians to obey the Jewish law and be circumcised.[47]

This is also the message of James'

44 Traditionally, scholars have argued that in Galatians 2 the apostle Paul gives a personal account of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. This view has been challenged by other commentators who believe that Galatians 2 describes Paul's famine relief visit of Acts 11. A third position equates Galatians 2 with Acts 18:22. An in-depth discussion on this subject can be found in H. Zeigan, *Aposteltreffen in Jerusalem: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Studie zu Galater 2,1-10 und den möglichen lukanischen Parallelen* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005).

45 Cf. R. Deines, 'Das Aposteldekret—Halacha für Heidenchristen oder christliche Rücksichtnahme auf jüdische Tabus?' in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. J. Frey, D.R. Schwartz and S. Gripentrog (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 323-395 (esp. 327).

46 Bauernfeind, *Kommentar und Studien zur Apostelgeschichte*, 187.

47 Cf. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 250.

speech, which Luke summarises in verses 13 to 21. In this speech James stresses that gentile Christians are included in God's people. Referring to the Cornelius incident that Peter also referred to in his speech (15:7), James argues that on this occasion God showed his favour to Gentiles and took from them 'a people for his name' (15:14). He goes on to say that this is in line with Old Testament prophecy which speaks of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel and the incorporation of gentile nations (15:15-18). For this reason, James concludes that Jewish Christians should not burden gentile believers by asking them to add to their new faith the whole Jewish law code. They are only to abstain from a few practices, which might cause offence among Jewish Christians:

> Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood (15:19-20).

Luke makes great efforts to show that this decision was the right one. While verse 19 suggests that the decisive voice lay with James, Luke points out that James' decision was supported not only by the other leaders but also by the whole Jerusalem church. In verses 22 to 23 he writes that 'the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church' decided to send some of their members together with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to deliver a letter with the council's decision. Furthermore, he mentions that the letter was received well by the Antiochene church (15:31), that Judas and Silas had a peaceful send off after having encouraged and strengthened the Antiochene Christians (15:32-33), and that Paul and Barnabas had no problems continuing with their ministry in Antioch (15:35). In other words, Luke presents a harmonious picture of the church after the Jerusalem council.

The council's decision, as Luke portrays it, was clearly a compromise. All the church leaders did was to ask gentile Christians to observe certain Jewish food laws and to abstain from sexual immorality.[48] In other words, the church decided not to demand cultural assimilation from gentile believers. It made clear that they were not expected to become Jewish. The church leadership realized that mandatory circumcision would have been a stumbling block for gentile Christian integration into the church and would endanger the unity of the whole church. However, gentile Christians were asked, as Willimon writes, 'to observe the minimum requirements that had been set for strangers wanting to enjoy fellowship with conscientious Jews'.[49]

The prohibition of eating non-kosher food needs to be seen as a reminder for non-Jewish Christians to

48 The four required abstentions mentioned in verse 19 to 20 have been the object of much debate among biblical scholars. Some have argued that they must be regarded as being moral, while others see them as being of a ceremonial nature. For an extensive discussion on this subject see Deines, 'Das Aposteldekret—Halacha für Heidenchristen oder christliche Rücksichtnahme auf jüdische Tabus?', 352-377.

49 Willimon, *Acts*, 130.

be sensitive to Jewish scruples but not as an effort to absorb them into Jewish culture and tradition.[50] For the early church, to have common meals was an essential aspect of church life.[51] If this table fellowship was going to survive, gentile believers would have to respect the Jewish concerns about purity upon which their cultural and national identity in a Diaspora situation depended. Köstenberger and O'Brien comment on the council's decision:

> Without necessarily solving all future problems of relationships between Jewish and gentile Christians, this way of living by the gentile believers would make fellowship with more conservative Jewish believers possible.[52]

In summary, the fact that Luke gives such an extensive report about the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and that he mentions the council's decision again in Acts 16:4 and 21:25 demonstrates his concern for church unity and racial equality within the church, as well as his aim to assure his Christian readership that a church composed of both Jews and Gentiles was not an apostate or heretical group but stood in continuity with Judaism.[53]

VIII Principles of Integration

The results of the above analysis of various New Testament churches and Paul's missionary activities as they are portrayed by Luke in the Book of Acts clearly contradict the view that the early church had a strategy of planting ethnic churches. On the contrary, they provide us with guidelines or principles that can help us to develop strategies for the integration of migrants into local indigenous churches.

1 The Congregation within a Congregation

The example of the church in Jerusalem shows that it might be necessary for a minority ethno-cultural group within a local church to have not only its own meetings but also its own ministers (cf. Acts 6:1-7). Where language barriers make it difficult for an ethno-cultural minority to take part fully in the church life of the majority group a church needs to offer separate language meetings and select, if possibly, ministers from the different groups to serve these groups. For a local church that has one or more groups of immigrants this means that it might need to develop a *congregation within a congregation* structure. In such a structure immigrants have a worship service, house group or Bible study meeting in their own language. However, this does not mean that they form a separate church; they remain part of the local church. As one local church all its congregations accept one overall church leadership, make important decisions together, and share resources with each other.

2 Unity

In the Book of Acts Luke also stresses

50 Cf. Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts*, 419.

51 Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts*, 419.

52 A.J. Köstenberger, P.T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001), 151.

53 Cf. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 22; Williams, *Acts*, 15-16.

that Christian unity is more than an ideal. Christian unity has to be lived in the local church. It finds its expression in common leadership, common service, and, if possible, common worship, as well as the willingness to make concessions (cf. Acts 6:2; 13:1, 15:19-20, 18:24-28). Luke underlines that for early church leaders like Paul the founding of separate gentile churches was not an option, even though the integration of Jewish and gentile Christians was a difficult enterprise.[54] Christians, whatever their ethno-cultural background, have a new identity. They are united through their common faith in Christ. This principle of unity in Christ calls Christians to integrate Christian migrants into existing indigenous churches. To establish completely separate, independent migrant churches would contradict the Christian doctrine of unity.

3 Equality

Luke demonstrates that there is no place for racial discrimination within the Christian church. In Christ all believers are spiritually equal, whatever their ethnic background (cf. Acts 15:8-11). Such an understanding of equality has implications for the treatment of migrants. While forced migrants, for example, are denied certain rights by society because of their legal status, churches must not do the same to Christian refugees and asylum seekers if they are to replicate the early church. Luke reminds his readers of the important role that refugees played in the mission of the first century church (cf. Acts 8:4-5; 11:19-20; 18:8). In other words, churches that minister to Christian migrants today should not treat them not differently from any other church members, i.e. they should not be discriminated against because of their legal status or ethno-cultural background. Instead, they need to give them the opportunity to serve in the church and to use their God-given gifts.

4 Non-Assimilation and Mutuality

Luke points out that at the Council of Jerusalem the early church decided to have a non-assimilation policy, i.e. it was decided that to become Christian, non-Jews did not have to become Jewish first (cf. Acts 15:19). The church knew that such an obligation would have been a stumbling block for its mission and the integration of non-Jewish believers. Burnett writes that '[in] rejecting circumcision for gentile converts the meeting also rejected cultural conversion'.[55] For a church involved with migrants this means that it must not expect them to abandon their language and all their traditions and customs and adopt the dominant culture.

In parallel, the Council of Jerusalem made clear that while there was no need for non-Jewish believers to give up their cultural heritage it required them to respect certain Jewish customs (cf. Acts 15:20). It defined integration as a mutual process. Migrants who want to join a local church are not entitled to demand radical change. They too have to respect the cultural norms of the dominant group. What is needed is, as Strong puts it, 'an attitude of mutual submission, prioritizing mutual accountability and fellowship over personal rights and freedoms'.[56]

5 Mixed-leadership

Luke stresses that New Testament churches, like those in Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, and Corinth were multi-ethnic communities (cf. Acts 11:19-20; 16:13-34; 17:4,12; 18:2, 7-10). It is significant that the leadership of these churches reflected not only the diverse local church membership but also the diversity of the whole body of Christ.[57] The fact that the role was not based on the politics of ethnicity but upon the giftings of the Holy Spirit established a protocol for unity which has relevance today.[58]

It follows that it is mandatory for multi-ethnic churches to select their leaders on this basis and to avoid a mono-ethnic leadership. A church that has an ethno-cultural diversity in its membership should foster and call leaders from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Green writes about multi-ethnic church leadership:

> Cross-cultural fellowship is not easy. We naturally tend towards our own kind. But to mix with those from other nations, other cultural backgrounds, should be a particular characteristic and glory of the Christian church.[59]

The same applies to local churches involved with Christian migrants. Such churches need to identify spiritual leaders from among them and call them into the overall leadership of the church. Doing so demonstrates that the local church takes the spiritual status of migrants seriously and validates the fact that they are brothers and sisters in Christ. Further, it shows a willingness to listen to them and to learn from them.

6 Mixed-Ministry Teams

Finally, Luke puts stress on the fact that Paul's missionary teams were culturally and ethnically diverse, too. People of different cultures and social rank worked together for the sake of the gospel (cf. Acts 4:36; 16:1; 18:1-4). For the New Testament church the God-given gifts and talents of people assumed greater importance than their socio-cultural background. In addition, the cultural insights which they brought to mission enabled the church to be more effective in its outreach.

54 Cf. E.J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission, Vol. 2* (Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 1370.

55 D.G. Burnett, *The Healing of the Nations: The Biblical Basis of the Mission of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 172.

56 D.K. Strong, 'The Jerusalem Council: Some Implications for Contextualization', in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narrative in Contemporary Context* eds. R.L. Gallagher and P. Hertig (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004) 196-208 (esp. 206).

57 N.E. Thomas, 'The Church in Antioch: Crossing Racial, Cultural, and Class Barriers', in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narrative in Contemporary Context* eds. R.L. Gallagher and P. Hertig (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 144-156 (esp. 151).

58 Cf. C.H. Cosgrove, 'Did Paul Value Ethnicity?' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (2006) 68(2), 268-290 (esp. 290).

59 M. Green, *30 Years that Changed the World: A Fresh Look at the Book of Acts* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 154.

Thomas speaks of the 'Antioch model of every-member ministries'.[60] A local church which wants to integrate Christian migrants should replicate this model.

An important step to integrate migrants into the local church is to help them to find opportunities of service according to their abilities and gifts. Serving others is an important dimension of Christian life. The status of migrants should not reduce people to the passive receipt of service from other church members. Migrants need an equal chance to serve side by side with indigenous Christians in roles of mutual reciprocity. Where equal opportunities exist their contribution towards God's mission can be recognised by the whole church and in the process their participation enables them to get to know other members of the church better and to form friendships.

60 Thomas, 'The Church in Antioch: Crossing Racial, Cultural, and Class Barriers', 148.

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Bevans and Bediako: Reconsidering Text-Based Models of Contextual Theologising

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KEYWORDS: *Translation model, countercultural model, radical discontinuity, narrative, dialectic, practitioner, best practice.*

I Introduction

IN 1992 STEPHEN BEVANS published *Models of Contextual Theology*, a typology of contextual theologising that outlined five methodologies: the translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic and transcendental models. A decade later Bevans published a revised and expanded edition that incorporated the countercultural model. These models are located across a continuum bounded by two primary parameters: text and context with each model being considered paradigmatic: representative of a number of approaches bearing similar characteristics. As Bevans further notes, the six models can be grouped into two categories: two *text-based* models and four *context oriented* models.

The primary problem this paper wants to address is the question of how to understand these models. Bevans was writing to identify current practices, and the level of interest his book engendered amply demonstrates he hit a chord. Now, more than fifteen years after it first appeared, it is appropriate to look back and consider the ramifications of this publication. Over the course of time *Models of Contextual Theology* has gained stature; it is now a text book for courses around the world and an integral element of missionary and missiological thinking and strategising. In short, it has entered into received wisdom, becoming less an account of contemporary practice and more a normative theoretical framework providing the foundations for emerging approaches.

The following article addresses this transition considering the models not as expressions of what is but as platforms for what will be. This necessarily involves consideration of how well

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