“THE INTERCULTURAL CONGREGATION:

“THINKING, LIVING, AND LOVING RACIAL DIVERSITY WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH.”

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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BY

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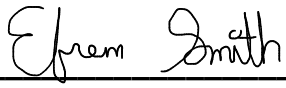

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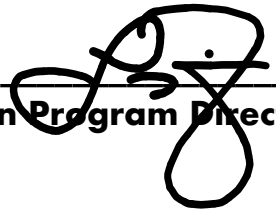

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ABSTRACT

Stuart Norman Williams

"The Intercultural Congregation:

"Thinking, Living, and Loving Diversity within the Local Church."

The problem of difference continues to pose a significant challenge within Western society at large and to the local church in particular. With steady population growth through immigration, fear and exclusion of the other has become a growing reality. How the church responds to diverse persons within a changing culture requires thoughtful theological engagement, intentional practices, and ongoing discernment. This dissertation then seeks to answer the question: how can the local church embody a biblical ecclesiology that is integrative, inclusive, and honoring of diverse races and cultures as witness to the reconciling power of God? Drawing upon historical precedents, sociological analysis, and key biblical texts, the work done here aims to reframe our approach to the problem by discerning the potential that diversity of race and culture affords the local church to embody the transforming and inclusive grace of God in an increasingly diverse world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wife Ruthanne and our children Lauren, Luke, and Alanna, without your sacrifice, support, and encouragement this project would not have happened.

To my older brother Quinton and my late dad Neville James Williams, thank you for teaching me how to be a faith-filled pastor, a faithful husband, a compassionate father, a supportive brother, and a beloved son.

To my church family, thank you for the generous provision of a sabbatical break to complete this project. Words fall short to express my gratitude to all who stepped in to serve so that I could have this time away from my pastoral work.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents and two younger siblings who tragically lost their lives on September 29th, 1996. Thank you for raising me to love God and others without fear or discrimination. Until we meet again.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the work done herein is to advance the need for an intercultural expression of the church given the growth in racial diversity within Western society and the implicit challenges such diversity poses. The intercultural church is presented as a necessary response to the historical precedents of assimilation and segregation within Western society and as a contextually informed and biblical response to the growing racial and cultural diversity within the church where I currently serve as senior pastor. The argument does not hold racial diversity (or the intercultural church framework) as the primary mission of the church but as a needed configuration for the church to fulfill its mission to 'make disciples of all nations' at a time when racial polarization in Western society has intensified. It is my aim to show that the mission of the church to 'make disciples of all nations' requires 'communities of disciple-makers from all nations' and that historically such diversity within the church has been problematic. Consequently, the challenges for realizing an intercultural church are significant and rarely achieved due to segregationist and assimilationist approaches that have characterized Western Christian engagement with Blacks, immigrants, and Indigenous others. The intercultural church is not offered as a new expression for the church but as a return to the earliest expression of the church as articulated in Acts 15. The work then aims to offer a practical framework for an intercultural approach to Christian practices of prayer, table fellowship, and pastoral care that is grounded in a biblical perspective of diversity. Ultimately, the intercultural church is presented as a counter-cultural response to the forces of racism, segregation, and cultural assimilation, and as the true bride of Christ as revealed in John's vision in Revelation 7:9–10:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!"[1]

THE PROBLEM OF DIFFERENCE

The problem of difference can be defined as the challenge any form of diversity (race, culture, status, gender, sex, beliefs) presents to attaining justice, freedom and peace within the church and society at large.[2] For our purposes here, the problem is limited to the challenge racial and cultural difference poses to the Christian Church. The problem of difference has historically contributed to religious and political conflict and still shapes how nations, organizations, and the Christian Church relate to growing racial and cultural diversity today. The problem of difference fueled the ethnic genocides in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and catalyzed the system of racial segregation known as Apartheid in South Africa.[3] More contextually, the problem of difference undergirds the violence done against Indigenous people across the globe since the start of modern colonialism in the sixteenth century. Colonization was predicated upon European cultural superiority and enforced in the name of Christianity at the cost of the unique cultures of Indigenous people in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Ackermann articulates the significance of

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[1] All scripture references taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE).

[2] Denise M. Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human: An Ethic of Relationship in Difference and Otherness." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 102 (1998), 14, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000983112&site=ehost-live.

[3] "Western Colonialism," Britannica, accessed October 19, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism.

the problem for Christians today: "Few issues have exercised so powerful a hold over the thought of this century as that of 'the other' or what is known as 'the problem of difference."[4] As a white female, theologian and activist who advocated for the end to racial segregation during Apartheid South Africa (1948–1990), Ackermann understood the problem from within her lived experience of privilege and marginalization and witnessed the end to the formalized policy of Apartheid following the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. Yet, the end of Apartheid did not signal the end to the problem in South Africa or in much of our world today. While Western society continues to grow racially diverse, fear regarding the impact the 'other' may have upon Western values persists with direct implications for the Christian Church today.

In Canada, the problem is reflected in broader national concerns regarding safety, security, and vetting processes for refugee claimants. Christian churches, along with other religious groups and social support agencies, have had to discern how to welcome the 'other' amidst fear and criticism surrounding their arrival. Similarly, in the United States, the building of a wall to keep illegal workers out and the persisting tensions surrounding the 'Black Lives Matters' movement, reveal the growing tension that 'the other' poses to American society.[5] Many consider the Brexit decision, by which the United Kingdom formally separated from the European Union, to be fueled by similar fears over the impact 'the other' will continue to make on the economic and social fabric of Britain. On the extreme side of the spectrum, the rise of the 'far right' in North America and Europe is well documented and similarly incited by fears

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[4] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 14.

[5] Rubén Rodríguez, "Do Black Lives Matter to White Christians?: A Theological Reflection in Three Movements." *Cross Currents* 68, no. 1 (March 2018): 123–124. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAi9KZ190422000133&site=ehost-live.

associated with the perceived threat immigrants and racialized 'others' pose to white privilege and power.[6]

Over three decades ago Neusner alerted us to the need for the inclusion of others within our religious frameworks in Western society: "The single most important problem facing religion for the next hundred years is how to think through the difference, how to account, within one's own faith and framework, for the outsider, indeed for many outsiders, thinking about 'The Other' in religion, it is necessary, but is it possible?"[7] Looking back, particularly from the fourth century onward, we will see the development of Christianity as the religion of the Western world that became increasingly linked to European cultural identity.[8] This linkage carries implications for the Church in North America today and is significant given the growth in racial diversity we are witnessing within Canada and the United States in particular. Today our world is less defined by geographic boundaries, more economically interdependent and increasingly diverse. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, Canada has welcomed over 1,088,015 refugees since 1980 and project that by the year 2036 immigrants will represent close to thirty percent of the overall Canadian population.[9] This number includes those who were recognized as refugees in

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[6] Alan Davis, "White Nationalism," *Touchstone* 38, no. 2 (June 2020): 42, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAi5IE200713000151&site=ehost-live.

[7] Jacob Neusner, "Thinking about 'the Other' in Religion: It Is Necessary, but Is It Possible?" *Modern Theology* 6 no. 3 (April 1990): 273, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000827481&site=ehost-live.

[8] Vince L Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), chap. 1, Kindle.

[9] "Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship," Government of Canada, accessed August 29, 2022, https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2021/12/canada-welcomes-the-most-immigrants-in-a-single-year-in-its-history.html.

Canada and those who were resettled from overseas.[10] Notably, despite the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, Canada welcomed more immigrants in a single year than at any other time in history.[11] Over seventy-five percent of the population growth in 2021 is attributed to immigration.[12] This record year included the reception of thousands of displaced Syrian and Iranian refugees.[13] In 2022, Canada continues to welcome Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion of their country. Based upon this data, analyst projections, and immigration trends, Canadian neighborhoods will continue to undergo significant change as a result of immigration. As our neighborhoods become more racially and culturally diverse, how will the Christian Church respond? Despite the potential that immigration affords the church, most evangelical and mainline churches in Canada remain homogenous missing the opportunity to create a biblical ecclesiology that is integrative, inclusive, and honoring of diverse races and cultures.[14]

An Intercultural Response

I was raised as a Christian within a racially segregated South African society and church. I am a racialized black male and an immigrant to Canada. I currently serve as the senior pastor of a Canadian church in which I have been a notable minority for most of my time in service to the congregation.[15] I am married to a Euro Canadian woman and our children are racially mixed.

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[10] "Refugees in Canada," The UN Refugee Agency, accessed August 31, 2022, https://www.unhcr.ca/in-canada/refugees-in-canada/.

[11] Government of Canada, "Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship."

[12] Government of Canada, "Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship."

[13] Government of Canada, "Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship."

[14] Joel Thiessen, *The Meaning of Sunday: The Practice of Belief in a Secular Age* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2015), 168–169.

[15] Here the term minority is used quantitively as I was one of only a numeric few racialized people in the predominantly Euro Canadian congregation.

These factors, past and present, undoubtedly influence my interest in the subject at hand. As in the case of liberation and feminist theology I embrace the idea that my race or gender does not harm critical reflection but enables a new way of understanding from within the experience of marginalization. This does not imply that my research cannot be objective, but objectivity does not necessarily mean neutrality. As Harding points out: "those who are often most painfully affected by an issue gain a privileged understanding of its parameters."[16]

Webster defines the term 'intercultural' as "that which occurs between two or more cultures."[17] For our purposes, the use of intercultural is preferred in place of the term multicultural or multiethnic. While multiculturalism and multiethnic speaks to representation of multiple cultures or ethnicities within a configuration of people such as the church, an intercultural approach to the local church holds the dynamic interplay of cultures as central to the formation of the church and to bearing witness to the reconciling power of God. Old Testament scholar Safwat Marzouk explains that the Bible offers a vision of an intercultural church as: "a church that fosters a just diversity, integrates different cultural articulations of faith and worship, and embodies in the world an alternative to the politics of assimilation and segregation."[18]

Consideration of the problem of difference within the church is then ultimately a question of ecclesiology and theology; how to respond to the 'other' as 'the people of God (ecclesia),' in accordance with our best interpretation of scripture (theology). Transforming our churches into communities that value racial diversity and seeing the transformative potential such diversity

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[16] Heather Walton, *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* (London: SCM, 2014), xvii.

[17] "Intercultural," Merriam-Webster, accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intercultural.

[18] Safwat Marzouk, *Intercultural Church*: *A Biblical Vision for an Age of Migration* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 3.

holds, may seem idealistic and unattainable given the historic and present-day systemic challenges the church faces. Years of sociological research show that people adhere to the "homophily principle," preferring to associate with those who are most like themselves.[19] A review of past Christian engagement with diverse people will reveal the challenge cultural superiority within the Church presents an intercultural church. Yet, the argument presented here is that the pursuit of such a church is not only necessary, given the demographic shifts within broader Canadian society, but sorely needed when the fear of difference threatens the witness of the church to the reconciling power of God. Consequently, the realization of an intercultural church will be contingent upon the willingness of church leaders and congregants within the local church to embrace the challenges, discomforts, and changes that diversity of race presents to re-forming homogenous congregations to embody an intercultural ecclesiology.

METHODOLOGY

As we begin to consider an intercultural approach to local church ministry, I will employ an ecological framework to contextualize the unique challenge growing diversity poses to the local church. An ecological framework to studying congregations locates the church in its broader social context to observe how a congregation interacts with other organizations, institutions, and people.[20] In Chapter One we will turn our attention to the changing racial demographics within the Northern Hills Suburbs (hereafter NHS), the suburban area the church

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[19] K. D. Dougherty, G. Martí, and T. W. Ferguson, "Racial Dynamics of Congregations and Communities: A Longitudinal Analysis of United Methodist Congregations, 1990–2010," *Social Forces*, 100 no.1 (2021): 346, https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soaa124.

[20] Nancy L. Eiseland and R. Stephen Warner, "Ecology: Seeing the Congregation in Context," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*," ed. Nancy T. Ammerman, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 40.

facility is located in. We will then pay attention to the formation and development of the local church, Skyview Community Church of the Nazarene, hereafter Skyview Church. Specific attention will be paid to the founding ethos and demographic changes since the church was planted in 1989. Finally, we will pay attention to the emerging tensions arising from the growing diversity within the local church.

In the literature review in Chapter Two we will first examine the historical development of Christianity as the religion of Western society beginning with the reign of Constantine in the fourth century. In this section, we will discern how Christianity became associated with European cultural identity as we then consider the implications for racialized people within the predominantly Euro Canadian Church today. Thereafter we will review the historic and present-day relationship between the Church and the Indigenous people of Canada by paying specific attention to how Christian engagement with Indigenous people damaged the witness of the Church by diminishing the value of indigenous culture. Here we will also consider how European cultural norms legitimized the discrimination and subjugation of Indigenous people by presenting them with a culturally assimilative Christianity embedded in a normative European cultural frame. Finally, we will review the problem within the development of the Church of the Nazarene in the USA/Canada region through its formative theological priorities, Black participation, and present racial demographic constituency. Notably, we will ask why an international denomination, that spans diverse nations and cultures globally, reflects a disproportionate percentage of racial diversity in its constituency in the USA/Canada region.

The literature review will then be brought into conversation with select biblical texts to frame a theological perspective for addressing the problem from within the context of the local church in Chapter Three. By resisting the assimilationist and segregationist approaches of the

past I will endeavor to present an alternative ministry framework that values diversity as a needed configuration of the local church. Chapter Four considers Christian values, perspectives, postures, and practices related to prayer, change, table fellowship, and pastoral care in pursuit of becoming an intercultural church. In Chapter Five, we will conclude by paying attention to the implications, limitations and recommendations for introducing an intercultural ministry framework within the local church.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM IN CONTEXT

The problem of difference within Western society is not limited to social agencies and political parties but presents a challenge to the local church also. Within the life of our predominantly Euro-Canadian congregation, Skyview Church, growth in racial diversity has mirrored this broader societal trend with immigrants to Canada forming much of the numeric growth we have encountered. Questions of 'who we are becoming' and 'to what extent we will change' surface among existing congregants who share in both the pride of numeric growth and the concern such diversity presents.[21] Some longstanding Euro-Canadian congregants have left our congregation raising the question: "to what extent, if any, has our changing racial demographic contributed to their departure?"[22] Sociological studies have shown that growth in racial diversity often precipitates "white flight" where the White majority choose to leave neighborhoods and churches that become racially diverse.[23] Alternatively, when churches grow in racial diversity this does not always imply shared power or result in the reception and inclusion of racial others as equals. In many of these churches 'white normativity' prevails as the

[21] Following the congregation's transition into their own church facility we encountered rapid growth primarily through immigrants new to Canada. In the first six months, our worship attendance doubled creating both excitement and concern from longstanding attendees. Comments made to our staff, board members, and ministry coordinators revealed both excitement and concern about who we are becoming as a church.

[22] The term Euro-Canadians here refers to people either born in Europe or can trace their ancestry to the continent of Europe. This comprises a range of people given the diversity of countries in Europe yet is common descriptor for the majority Canadian population.

[23] David A. Busic, *The City: Urban Churches in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition* (Kansas City, Mo: The Foundry Publishing, 2020), 39.

beliefs and practices of White people are upheld and the views of people in other racial groups are viewed as "special, unusual, or even dangerous."[24]

The Skyview Church is a member of the global Nazarene denomination. Today the Church of the Nazarene is present in over 160 world areas spanning a diversity of race and cultures through church assemblies, schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, and various compassionate care ministry centers. Significantly, as the literature review will show, the USA/Canada region of the denomination does not reflect such racial or cultural diversity despite increasing immigration (Appendix A). While attempts have and continue to be made to grow multicultural churches on the region, congregational research studies show that such churches often fail to incarnate a diversity of people justly because they remain culturally homogenous and primarily assimilationist.[25] Marzouk explains that while multicultural churches celebrate racial and cultural differences they often lack deeper engagement among existing racial and culturally different groups.[26] In these multicultural churches, representation of diverse races and cultures suffices while the potential diversity presents to enrich and transform the church for mission in a racially diverse world remain unattended. Edmondson and Brennan offer a more poignant critique of the multicultural church as communities who become complicit in maintaining the structure and privilege of the dominant white culture because it fails to address the foundations of power and privilege upon which such churches are predicated.[27] Thus, research shows that diverse representation alone is insufficient to transform the local church into

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[24] Christina Edmondson and Chad Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2022), 218.

[25] Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism,* 218.

[26] Marzouk, *Intercultural Church*, 14–15.

[27] Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism,* 154.

an intercultural expression of the church that values and embraces racial and cultural difference. In these multicultural settings racist attitudes and behaviors prevail when diverse cultural representation is the primary aim. Accordingly, multicultural churches ultimately run the risk of betraying a faithful stance against systemic racism.[28] The intercultural church in view here is then "a body of believers from diverse racial backgrounds who worship and fellowship together, serve each other in love while learning together, and in so doing bear witness to the world of God's reconciling love."[29] While the mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations, an intercultural expression of the church can become a significant means to reaching a growingly diverse society within the changing racial Canadian landscape.

Land Acknowledgment and Reconciliation

Skyview Church is located on the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.[30] In 2021 the Skyview Church Board recognized the need to publicly acknowledge the Indigenous land upon which our church facility is built as a part of a broader interest to work toward reconciliation with the Indigenous people of Canada. Consequently, a land acknowledgment plaque was commissioned and installed in the foyer of the church and added to the homepage of our church website. The land acknowledgement statement reads:

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[28] Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism,* 40–42.

[29] Marzouk, *Intercultural Church*, 16.

[30] "Land Acknowledgment," Calgary Foundation, accessed October 19, 2022, https://calgaryfoundation.org/about-us/reconciliation/land-acknowledgement/

"Skyview Community Church acknowledges the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.Indigenous custom holds that acknowledging the land is a first and important step toward reconciliation.[31] As Indigenous lands were violently possessed by Europeans, the path to reconciliation must begin with acknowledging the rightful first people of the land upon which we now live and call Canada. In agreeing to introduce a land acknowledgment statement the Skyview Church board expressed a desire to honor the true history of North America and to pursue reconciliation with those whose land, culture, and children were forcefully taken. The commitment to begin this process toward reconciliation was not met with significant opposition within the church though not everyone in the congregation was comfortable with the board's decision as was reflected in one parishioner's comment: "It seems like we care more about social justice issues than we do about bringing people to Christ!"[32] This comment reveals what Brennan and Edmundson have noted in their study of systemic racism within the church; matters of social justice are often viewed with suspicion by White evangelicals and at times considered to be contrary to the mission of the church.[33] Ongoing challenges and opportunities arise to educate our people on why land acknowledgement matters and given the recent discovery of thousands of unmarked graves on

[31] Calgary Foundation, "Land Acknowledgement."

[32] Anonymous, comment passed on to author by church board member on behalf of anonymous parishioner, July 15, 2022.

[33] Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism,* 54.

former Christian residential school sites the dark past of Christian engagement with the Indigenous people of Canada has been unearthed. In pursuit of reconciliation Skyview Church continues to provide educational resources through our church website and our weekly newsletter to help our people gain an understanding for the true history of the Indigenous people of Canada and their relationship to Christianity. The pastoral staff have also attended training seminars hosted by our denominations district office to learn more about the present challenges Indigenous people in Canada face.[34] In addition to these initiatives the Skyview Church board along with all ministry leaders and staff engaged in reading a book on embracing the gift of cultural difference within the Church by Keetoowah elder and theologian Randy Woodley.

While the neighborhoods in proximity to the Skyview Church facility continue to become increasingly diverse, the Indigenous people of Canada remain notably absent. There are two primary reasons for this. First, more than half of the 2.2 million Indigenous people of Canada live on reserve land segregated from the rest of the Canadian population.[35] These lands have been designated as the physical and spiritual homelands for Indigenous people by the government of Canada, are governed by tribal elders, and remain exclusively occupied by Indigenous people. Still today, conflict arises between the local and federal government and Indigenous peoples surrounding land rights within Canada. While the Indigenous people and the Canadian government have agreed to autonomy and self-governance of these lands, population

[34] The Canada West District Church of the Nazarene under the leadership of the District Superintendent, Reverend Rose Brower Young, established affinity groups in March of 2020 on the subject of Indigenous history as a means of educating pastors on the district. The Canada West District also established a taskforce to continue the work of justice discerning how the church may address our Indigenous history in particular and serve as a resource for Christian leaders and the local church on indigenous church relations.

[35] "The Canadian Census 2021," "Statistics Canada, accessed October 30, 2022, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.pdf?st=uOwTVsPB

growth and economic advancement consistently challenge these formal land agreements. Most recently, the expansion of the Stoney Trail highway bypass in Calgary (named after the Indigenous Stoney Nakota Nation) has been met with resistance by Indigenous elders as the city pushes to have a large segment of this highway cut through reserve lands. A second factor that contributes to a lack of indigenous representation within the local church is that the relationship between the Church and Indigenous people of Canada is marred by abuse. Through the establishment of government-sponsored Christian residential schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many Indigenous children suffered abuse at the hands of those charged with their education and care. Most of these schools were operated by the Christian Church (Catholic, Anglican, United Church of Canada) with the primary mandate to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture.[36] Many Indigenous children were subjected to physical and sexual abuse, forced to speak English instead of their native tongue, and forced to wear uniforms and not permitted to wear their traditional clothing.[37] This history offers a formidable challenge to present-day efforts toward reconciling Indigenous people within the broader Canadian culture and within the Christian church. In our local church we only have two people, out of a congregation of two hundred, who openly identify as Indigenous.

GROWTH & CHANGE IN THE NORTHERN HILLS SUBURBS (NHS)

The Skyview Church building is located within the Northern Hills Suburbs of the city of Calgary (hereafter NHS). NHS comprises five neighborhoods: Coventry Hills, Country Hills,

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[36] Randy Woodley, *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Ethnic Diversity* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 18.

[37] Woodley, *Living in Color,* 82–83.

Harvest Hills, Country Hills Village, and Panorama Hills with a recorded population of 51,385 people according to the 2016 census (Appendix B).[38] Notably, the NHS has ten registered church groups comprising five ethnic specific churches; two predominantly Euro-Canadian churches; a Mormon church; and two churches that indicate that they are ethnically diverse which includes Skyview Church.[39] Seven out of nine Christian congregations in the NHS are ethnically homogenous: two Euro-Canadian and five ethnic specific congregations. Apart from Skyview Church, only one other church, a recent church plant named North Point Community Church, reports being a multiracial church.[40]

The second largest immigrant population in the NHS are people from Asia (China, Philippines, India) with the largest representation from East and Southeast Asia (China and India).[41] Racialized groups throughout Canada are showing growth. In 2021, South Asian (7.1%), Chinese (4.7%) and Black (4.3%) people together comprised 16.1% of Canada's total population.[42] The NHS within which the Skyview Church is located reflects this religious and racial diversity and growth as more immigrants settle in Calgary and its surrounding suburbs.

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[38] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census 2021."

[39] "Skyview Community Church," Google Maps, accessed November 13, 2022, https://www.google.com/search?q=skyview+church+of+the+nazarene].

[40] Here multiracial refers to congregations in which no particular racial group comprise more than 80% of its constituents.

[41] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census 2021."

[42] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census 2021."

COUCHES, COFFEE & CHATS

The Skyview Community Church of the Nazarene is now a racially diverse church though this was not always the case. The congregation was planted in 1989 and met in various rental facilities for most of its existence. In October of 2018, the one-hundred-and-twenty-person congregation successfully raised enough funds to finish the construction of their first church building and relocated into the NHS. The construction of the church facility and relocation to the NHS was a significant achievement for the one-hundred-and-ten-person congregation with many longstanding congregants expressing their excitement and relief that they now finally had a place to call home.[43] The new church facility brought an end to more than three decades of meeting in rental facilities and was a catalyst for significant growth and change in the racial demographic makeup of the church. By the fall of 2019 Skyview's average worship attendance increased by 85 percent to two hundred and three persons.[44] Given the prevailing racial diversity within the NHS as reported above, the new church facility attracted many newcomers, and the congregational growth reflected this diversity.[45] The overall reaction from existing congregants was surprise and delight but also concern for the rate at which the congregation had changed. Notably, the impact of being renters for close to thirty years created a congregation of commuters whose ministry activity was primarily directed toward those already in the congregation to the neglect of the people within the neighborhood in which the church gathered

[43] The theme of the building campaign was: "A Place to Call Home." This theme was chosen by our stewardship campaign chair and reflected the general perspective and desire within the congregation to be established in a particular place that they would consider home.

[44] "Statistical Summary Report," The Church of the Nazarene, accessed October 31, 2022, https://reports.nazarene.org/research/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=Research.StatChurchSummary&OrgID=853.

[45] The Church of the Nazarene, "Statistical Summary Report."

for worship. Now the congregation was comprised of people from within the NHS, some of whom walk to church services from the surrounding neighborhoods.

HOMOGENOUS BY DESIGN

Skyview Church was planted in 1989 as New Life Fellowship by a pastor with a heart for reaching the unchurched. The founding pastor, Bryan Roller, was an accomplished musician and live music was instrumental to the ministry of the church from the outset. Roller came to faith in Christ later in life following a rather tempestuous adolescence and young adult life.[46] His conversion marked a dramatic change, and he soon discerned a calling to pastoral ministry. After completing seminary in Kansas City, Roller returned to Calgary and sought to plant a church to reach the unchurched and the unaffiliated. Coffee service during congregational worship, a casual dress code, and contemporary worship music characterized the church plant in those early days and were all intended to make the idea of church more appealing and seeker friendly.

The homogenous unit principle is what sociologists describe as the process of appealing to a particular demographic by developing strategies and methods to reach that target group.[47] Interestingly, this principle was first introduced by missiologist Donald A. McGavran (1897–1990), a former professor of mission, church growth, and South Asian studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.[48] McGavran primarily viewed the principle as a

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[46] Bryan Roller, interview with author, June 05, 2021.

[47] Wayne McClintock, "Sociological Critique of the Homogeneous Unit Principle," *International Review of Mission* 77, no 305 (January 1988): 108, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000799236&site=ehost-live.

[48] Donald A. McGavran and Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

strategy for evangelization within foreign mission areas. As a missionary he saw the evangelistic potential indigenous people possessed to reach their own ethnic group because they had shared interest, common knowledge, and lived experience.[49] The homogenous unit principle also appealed to those interested in church growth in North America and would eventually become the guiding principle for growth strategies, developed by church growth expert Peter Wagner in the 1980's. The homogenous unit principle contributed to the success of the mega church phenomenon.[50] Mega churches are typically congregations that average more than two thousand people in weekly worship attendance. These churches can be diverse though they are primarily characterized by an attractional model of ministry that appeals to a target demographic. Wagner's approach to growing churches was driven by the sociological evidence that appealing to 'one demographic of people' would yield more success than attempting to reach diverse groups of people with varying interests. The simplicity of the principle is that it eliminates cultural and socioeconomic barriers to growth by appealing to a particular demographic.[51] As churches embraced the homogenous unit principle in search of numeric growth and became successful in attracting particular interest groups, they inadvertently contributed to the demise of the local neighborhood 'parish' church.[52] People began to look for churches that offered programs that met their needs and appealed to their lifestyle and in so doing bypassed the church where they lived. More pertinently, these mega-churches contributed to growth within churches

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[49] McClintock, "Sociological Critique," 107–108.

[50] Ryan Wilson, "The New Ecclesiology: Mega-Church, Denominational Church, and No Church." *Review & Expositor 107*, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 61–63, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001785378&site=ehost-live.

[51] Wilson, "The New Ecclesiology," 61–72.

[52] Tim Soerens, *Everywhere You Look: Discovering The Church Where You Live* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 68.

marked by racial and cultural similarity. As the intention was to appeal to a particular demographic, this meant that similarity rather than diversity was pursued.

Skyview was designed to reach the middle-class Euro-Canadian citizen, who enjoyed contemporary songs over hymns, coffee during worship services, and a laid back and casual church atmosphere.[53] The appeal to the White middle class was further catalyzed by the physical location of the worship meeting space in those formative years. A commercial office complex was financially more affordable to rent but access was limited to only those with cars. Canadian winters can be harsh and public transportation to commercial areas in the late 1990's was limited on weekends. Despite this deterrent, the below-market rental rate of the commercial space made the location far more appealing for church planting and concerns about accessibility were initially overlooked. In the years that followed the church relocated several times and despite losses and gains in attendees, it remained a primarily White middle class commuter congregation. When the founding pastor left in 2008, I was called in 2009 as the second pastor to the congregation and the first pastor of color.

CULTURE, CHANGE, CONFLICT!

By 2036 it is anticipated that close to a third of the population of Canada will comprise immigrants.[54] While our neighborhoods continue to reflect racial diversity, most Canadian churches remain predominantly monoracial and are in decline.[55] Less than eight percent of

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[53] Bryan Roller, interview with author, June 05, 2021.

[54] "Ethnic Diversity and Immigration," Statistics Canada, accessed October 12, 2020, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm#a4.

[55] "Multicultural Ministries," Church of the Nazarene USA/Canada, accessed October 12, 2020, https://www.usacanadaregion.org/multicultural-ministries.

Catholic and Protestant churches in North America are multiracial.[56] When I assumed the role as pastor, Skyview Church was primarily a Euro-Canadian middle-class church and remained that way until we relocated to the NHS in 2018. As noted earlier, the NHS is a growingly diverse region with close to half of the population comprising first and second-generation immigrants (Appendix B). Our church facility is located adjacent to a strip mall and other commercial/retail businesses that reflect the ethnic diversity within the NHS. From our church parking lot, six ethnic restaurants are in view (Vietnamese, East Indian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Lebanese) as well as T & T Supermarket one of the largest Chinese supermarkets in the city. Professional and other services like a dentist and doctor's office, a walk-in clinic, a daycare, a pre-school, a Tai Kwando studio, and a recycling depot surround the church parking lot. The adjacent commercial and retail space is a hive of activity throughout the week revealing what the census data confirms; the NHS is now an increasingly diverse community with a high population of Asian immigrants.

The construction of the Skyview Church facility in the NHS was a catalyst for change within the congregation. Since the relocation to the NHS in 2018, we have experienced a significant change in the racial makeup of the congregation. The Church of the Nazarene denomination requires an annual report from its churches that accounts for worship attendance, growth and decline in church membership, income, and other statistical reporting pertaining to the activity of the church. However, the denomination does not require any data on the racial

[56] Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 4.

makeup of the local church as a part of annual reporting.[57] What we don't count is telling and given the significant growth in racial diversity across the USA/Canada region one may question why racial demographic data is not included by a denomination that records various other statistics on growth.

While long-standing members of Skyview Church have expressed optimism at the growth in diversity and increase in attendance, some have also raised concerns regarding the pace at which the church has changed.[58] In addition to these concerns, some immigrants new to us have questioned if they will find belonging and acceptance in our congregation.[59] As a person of color and an immigrant to Canada, immigrants new to our church, often confide in me. These people share their hopes, fears, and disappointments as they attempt to integrate into Canadian culture and into the life of the formerly Euro-Canadian church. Immigrants view me as someone who can empathize with their immigrant experience and understand what it's like to face the challenges implicit to integrating into a new culture and climate. It is important to acknowledge that in the pursuit of becoming an intercultural church, my identity as an immigrant and person of color, along with my leadership influence as senior pastor, contributes to my interest in pursuing a model for the church that is welcoming of all people including those who immigrated to Canada.

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[57] The Annual Pastor Report for the Church of the Nazarene on the USA/Canada Region does not require reporting on racial classification of members or attendees. While the supplemental report inquires as to whether the church is multicultural, there is no other racial analysis data requested or recorded.

[58] Church Board & Ministry Coordinators Feedback, monthly board meeting discussion facilitated by author, July 2019.

[59] Linda Bernal (Columbia) and Jennifer Lewars (Jamaica), book club discussion on Jemar Tisby's book: *The Color of Compromise*, shared with author, July 2021.

In an interview conducted with Precious Gaborone, a recent immigrant from Botswana in her late twenties she remarked: "I joined the worship team myself because I feel called to use, to share what I have. I must admit that the songs we sing, it's a different custom from the one I was used to but that's the beauty of it, it's different, and perhaps I just enjoy spontaneity as well as different, I can learn to appreciate both."[60] Precious was gracious in her response. While she noted the discomfort of not being able to worship "spontaneously" or to sing songs that she was accustomed to, she was open to learning how to appreciate the difference. It is important to note her willingness to appreciate diversity in a church culture in which her preferences are not upheld. Immigrants understand that assimilation is necessary to integrate into a new culture, but this often comes at the cost of what is culturally significant and unique about themselves.[61] Gonzalez points out that the "Myth of Assimilation" holds that in order for immigrants to become accepted within a dominant culture they have to fully assimilate by giving up what is culturally distinct about themselves including their language, cultural practices, and values.[62] Gonzalez critiques this false assimilationist perspective and offers that respecting the unique God-given culture and language of immigrants does not imply that they cannot participate and contribute meaningfully within the host society.[63]

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[60] Precious Gaborone, Zoom interview by author, September 9, 2020.

[61] Karen González, *Beyond Welcome: Centering Immigrants in Our Christian Response to Immigration* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2022), 3–6.

[62] González, *Beyond Welcome,* 3–6.

[63] González, *Beyond Welcome,* 20–23.

"Trunk or Treat" or "The Day of The Dead."

As the church becomes more racially diverse tensions surrounding what it means to be the church arise. When I recently met with a family who had immigrated to Canada from Mexico, they expressed their concern that our church hosts a "Trunk or Treat" community event on Halloween.[64] In their view, Halloween is like the annual Mexican cultural tradition, "Día de Muertos," the "Day of the Dead."[65] They explained that during this Mexican celebration people build private altars containing the favorite foods, beverages, photos, and memorabilia, of the departed. While well intentioned, they shared their conviction that in celebrating Halloween our church was intentionally participating in a pagan celebration that contradicted Christian values and beliefs concerning the dead. Following our meeting I presented their concern to our church board.[66] In response two board members who are also immigrants from Botswana and Jamaica, shared the family's concern, while the remaining seven board members, all Euro-Canadian, dismissed it. Those who dismissed the concern explained that for them the "Trunk or Treat" event is an important initiative for engaging neighbors on behalf of the church and does not contradict our values as Christians because they do not ascribe the same meaning to these events as immigrants do. While this response makes sense within the dominant Euro-Canadian framework, it disregards the concerns and perspectives of immigrants within our congregation and that of immigrants within the broader NHS. Significantly, proceeding with the event communicates that immigrant concerns are not valid as these are culturally different to the norm

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[64] Mexican Immigrant Family, meeting with author, December 2021.

[65] "Day of the Dead," History, accessed October 31, 2022, https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/day-of-the-dead.

[66] Church Board Discussion, facilitated by author, January 18, 2022.

and that immigrants must therefore learn to accept the prevailing cultural norm. If they do not accept the cultural norm, they can choose to not participate, or they may potentially choose to leave the congregation. It should be noted that the immigrant parents concern regarding the celebration stemmed from their desire to not have what they teach their children about such celebrations be contradicted by what the church chooses to celebrate. While all board members and leaders expressed an interest and desire to be welcoming to those outside the church, this case study shows that such welcome is predicated upon acceptance and adherence to the Euro-Canadian cultural norm. While immigrants are a growing part of the congregation their opinions and values are viewed as inferior to the dominant Euro-Canadian cultural perspective.

SUMMARY

Change is Upon Us

Van Gelder and Zscheile note that by the year 2050, the global south and east will house more than two-thirds of all Christians in the world.[67] While Christianity flourishes in the global south and east, churches in North America continue to decline despite immigration growth trends within Canadian and American society.[68] Van Gelder and Zscheile propose that a meaningful answer to the decline of Christianity in North America requires the church to recontextualize their understanding and approach to reaching a changing world.[69] As the response to these cultural shifts in the West remains largely unaddressed, churches must begin to acknowledge and

[67] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 1.

[68] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *God's Mission,* 1.

[69] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *God's Mission,* 1.

discern the need to adapt their approach. This includes their theological understanding of the doctrines concerning the church, which Van Gelder and Zscheile contend is still rooted in the perspective that Christendom is still in place.[70] A primary tenet of a Christendom perspective assumes that the church and civil government are united in their adherence to the Christian faith.[71] Instead, authors like Frost and Hirsch point us to a post Christendom reality in which the church is not at the center of civic influence, but on the margins of society learning again to be committed to the ministry of Christ to the poor, the vulnerable, the immigrant within society.[72] Canada is a post Christian country with a significant decline in those who claim Christian religious affiliation. More than 450 ethnic or cultural origins were reported in the 2021 Calgary census.[73] Just over half the Canadian population, 19.3 million people (53.3%), reported affiliation to the Christian religion.[74] This was a significant decrease from 67.3% in 2011 and 77% in 2001 who reported Christian religious affiliation.[75] In twenty years Christian religious affiliation diminished by 23.4 % in Canada. Additionally, while small comparative to Christian religious affiliation, the proportion of those who reported being Muslim, Hindu or Sikh has more than doubled in 20 years.[76] From 2001 to 2021, Muslim affiliation grew from 2.0% to 4.9%, Hindu affiliation from 1.0% to 2.3%, and Sikhs religious affiliation grew from 0.9% to 2.1%.[77]

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[70] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *God's Mission,* 1.

[71] Craig Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom* Perspective (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 77.

[72] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc. 2003), 17–31.

[73] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census 2021."

[74] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census 2021."

[75] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census 2021."

[76] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census 2021."

[77] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census 2021."

Diversity is Challenging

As in the previously noted “Trunk or Treat” case study, even when ethnic minorities express cultural perspectives that challenge the prevailing norm, such concerns are delegitimized and disregarded by the White majority. European cultural perspectives remain normative within a growingly diverse church and alternative cultural understanding is easily dismissed as contextually irrelevant and inferior. Additionally, most of our church board members do not consider their Christian practices as culturally conditioned, but rather uncritically assume these to be the norm for everyone who attends our church. While the practice of faith always finds cultural articulation, superior and ethnocentric claims over the practice of our Christian faith limits diverse cultural engagement within faith communities. Dismissal of this concern from the immigrant family as culturally irrelevant, reveals how difficult it is for a church to develop an intercultural approach to ministry that respects cultural diversity and does not explicitly or implicitly communicate ethnocentric control. This dominant cultural lens continues to limit the development of intercultural churches and is characteristic of the Christian Churches’ historic engagement with Indigenous peoples and people of color. To this history we now turn, to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and responses that limit an intercultural expression of the church.

CHAPTER 2: LOOKING BACK

IS CHRISTIANITY A WHITE MAN'S RELIGION?

Rodney Stark states:

> "Far too long, historians have accepted the claim that the conversion of the emperor Constantine (ca. 285-337) caused the triumph of Christianity. To the contrary, he destroyed its most attractive and dynamic aspects, turning a high-intensity, grassroots movement into an arrogant institution controlled by an elite who often managed to be both brutal and lax."[78]

Today a growing number of theologians (Bantu, Rah, Hirsch) agree with Stark's assessment concerning the detrimental impact of Constantine's actions upon the overall development and witness of the Christian Church since the fourth century.[79] Before the fourth century, Christian and Roman identity was not synonymous.[80] Scholars like Bantu and Rah contend that one of the most significant implications of Constantine making Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire was that the Christian faith became primarily associated with European cultural identity.[81] Hirsch clarifies that this association of Christianity with the Roman Empire catalyzed the rejection of all non-European articulations of the Christian faith leading to European control over the expression and articulation of the Christian faith in subsequent centuries.[82] Bantu emphasizes that the challenge for the Church in Western society today is one of 'identity politics' by which Christianity has historically been viewed as "the

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[78] Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 33.

[79] Stark, *For the Glory of God*, 33.

[80] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 23.

[81] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 18.

[82] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 58.

white man's religion" and associated primarily with European cultural identity since the rise of Constantine.[83] Constantine's approach to advancing his political power came through convening ecumenical councils to devise a common theology that would unite the Christians throughout the Roman Empire and in so doing secure the political link between the Church and the empire.[84] The formalization of Christian doctrine by these ecumenical councils in the fourth and fifth centuries "made normative the ways it defined imperial Christianity and vilified all else."[85] A significant consequence of Constantine's actions is that Christians outside of the Roman Empire were now seen to not only be followers of Jesus Christ but also of the Roman Emperor.[86] African and Persian Christians rejected this association for a variety of reasons.[87] One such reason stems from the theology articulated through the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). Bantu points out that African and Asian Christians in particular rejected the Council's articulation of Christ's nature when the Council insisted that Jesus existed in two natures (physis) and one person (hypostasis).[88] The Hellenistic articulation of the nature of Christ as existing in two natures following the hypostatic union challenged African and Asian perspectives that held Christ's humanity and divinity as existing as one.[89] Through Constantine's reign Western imperial culture began to define Christianity in ways that disregarded other cultures expressions of the Christian faith and over centuries still presents significant challenges for those who view Christianity

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[83] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 16.

[84] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 58.

[85] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples,* 20.

[86] Vince L. Bantu, "Is Christianity A White Man's Religion?," lecture presented at Wheaton College, January 23, 2018, lecture, 1:16:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMEVmEYHqJo

[87] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 29.

[88] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 29.

[89] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 30.

through this cultural and exclusive lens.[90] According to Bantu the perspective that the Christian faith is the religion of the Western world has become one of the more significant barriers to people of color receiving the Christian message in Western society today.[91]

Western Captivity of the Church

Rah contends that unless this association of Christianity with white European cultural identity, which he names the "Western captivity of the church," is overcome, Christianity in the United States and Canada (and much of the Western world) will remain inhospitable to people of color who will continue to reject the faith on account of its prevailing association with White cultural identity.[92] Speaking of the growing rejection of Christianity by non-Europeans and the acceptance of Islam by a growing number of African American males Bantu states: "their primary beef with Christianity is not theological but racial."[93] Bantu proposes that an answer to overcoming this ethnocentric view of Christian identity is for Christians to discern a bigger Christian narrative than the singular narrative they have become accustomed to.[94] Learning how Christianity spread and developed in Africa and Asia prior to the reign of Constantine is one way of reclaiming the Christian faith from the captivity of the European cultural identity.[95] Bantu asserts this is a needed and important contextual response to making churches hospitable to the

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[90] Bantu, lecture.

[91] Bantu, lecture.

[92] The phrase which Bantu borrows from Soon-Chan Rah refers to the ways in which Christianity in North America has been associated with white culture and identity.

[93] Bantu, lecture.

[94] Bantu, lecture.

[95] Bantu, lecture.

growing racial and cultural diversity reflected in our neighborhoods and cities in North America. A larger narrative can help to free racialized minorities from the perspective that associates Christianity with White normativity, colonization, and the enslavement of Africans during European colonial expansion since the reign of Constantine.[96] Bantu explains that for many African Americans in particular, they heard the gospel message of Jesus Christ only in the context of enslavement, segregation, and subjugation of Blacks.[97] He insists that the larger narrative of Christianity predates Constantine, colonization, the Jim Crow era, and Residential Schools, and reveals a Christian faith that found cultural articulation and expression free from violence and the subjugation of people of color.[98] Drawing upon recent archaeological discovery and historical records, Bantu shows that Africans contextualized the Christian message through their unique cultures long before the Constantinian Era in the third century.[99] In essence, Bantu's work aims to confront the perspective that Christianity is captive to one narrative, that of European culture and colonial expansion. He seeks to offer a broader expression of the Christian faith rooted in a history that precedes the Western empire and colonial rule, as the religion intended for all people and articulated through the rich diversity of all cultures and races. In doing so the possibility for the Church in the West to become hospitable to the growing diversity within society may be realized.

Cultural ethnocentrism is common to all world cultures. We may rightly question whether it is possible to practice our faith free from our own cultural articulation. Jesus expressed his

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[96] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 1–2.

[97] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 79.

[98] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples,* 1–2.

[99] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples,* 76.

faith and obedience to God as a Jewish male, embracing the cultural practices of worship and prayer unique to his Jewish heritage. It is therefore important to note that the critique Bantu, Rah, and Hirsch advances is not naïve or dismissive of cultures influence upon the practice of faith but directed squarely at the superiority and myopia that can easily become exclusive of others. Christian missionary and pastor Lesslie Newbigin (1909–1998) offered a helpful corrective to the Church in Western society based on his own cross-cultural missionary experience in India.[100] Newbigin's Christian understanding was significantly expanded by his immersion into the culture of India where he spent most of his adult life. During his time in India as a British missionary, Newbigin was confronted with his own cultural blindness and the realization that his own Christian perspective "was not untouched by cultural idolatry."[101] He understood that though the church ought to derive its self-understanding from God's revelation through scripture, it is imperative for Christians to enter into dialogue with Christians from other cultures and not be taken captive by their own cultural ethnocentricity.[102] Newbigin realized that cross-cultural engagement afforded him what he would not have been able to see otherwise. Goheen notes that it was through Newbigin's sustained engagement over decades with Christians in India that he was able to see what had previously eluded him.[103] Newbigin's ability to grasp a bigger picture for Christian faith and practice would not have occurred if he stayed at a distance or moved on quickly from engagement with the cultural other. Newbigin came to believe that Christians must

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[100] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), 2.

[101] Michael W. Goheen and N. T. Wright, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic. 2018), 140.

[102] Goheen and Wright, *Church and its Vocation,* 158.

[103] Goheen and Wright, *Church and its Vocation,* 158.

attain critical distance from their own culture in order to see what is not easily observable from within their own cultural framework.[104]

KILL THE INDIAN, SAVE THE MAN!

Thinking more contextually about the problem of difference within a Canadian setting requires a consideration of the church's engagement with the Indigenous people of Canada. The Indigenous people of Canada's exposure to Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was one of assimilation and forced adherence to government-sanctioned residential schools. These schools were primarily overseen by the Roman Catholic, United Church of Canada, and Anglican Churches.[105] The approach to Indigenous culture in these schools presumed European cultural ideals whilst viewing the unique cultures of the Indigenous peoples of Canada as inferior and anti-Christian.[106] Keetoowah Cherokee theologian Randy Woodley explains that the primary aim behind the residential Christian school system in Canada was assimilation: "to turn the Indigenous people into white Anglo-Saxon Protestants."[107] To do so meant that the unique cultural identities of the Indigenous people were intentionally violated in an effort to eliminate all that made them culturally distinct so they could be assimilated into the European cultural norm. Woodley explains that what was done to Indigenous people in the name of Christianity through residential school placements was nothing short of an onslaught on culture through

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[104] Goheen and Wright, *Church and its Vocation,* 158.

[105] "Residential Schools in Canada," The Canadian Encyclopedia, accessed October 31, 2022, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools

[106] Woodley, *Living in Color*, 18.

[107] Woodley, *Living in Color*, 18.

which to be Indian, was antithetical to being a Christian.[108] Duncan Campbell Scott (1913–1932) who oversaw the residential school system of Canada at its peak was considered to be an extreme assimilationist and is credited with coining the phrase: "Kill the Indian, save the man."[109] In 1920 Scott made residential school attendance mandatory and publicly mandated his agenda:

"I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone…. Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill."[110]

The recent discovery of unmarked graves containing thousands of Indigenous children's remains on former church-run residential school sites across Canada shocked the general population.[111] It is estimated that over the course of the residential school era (1880–1990), 150,000 Indigenous children were forcefully taken from their homes and their tribes and that between six thousand and twenty-five thousand of these children died.[112] Canadians expressed their shock at this discovery and several adults within the local church confessed that they knew very little about residential schools or Indigenous history. In response to the discovery of these

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[108] Woodley, *Living in Color*, 18.

[109] "Until There Is Not a Single Indian in Canada," Facing History and Ourselves, accessed October 19, 2022, https://www.facinghistory.org/en-ca/resource-library/until-there-not-single-indian-canada.

[110] Facing History and Ourselves, "Until There Is Not a Single Indian in Canada."

[111] "The Story Was Hidden," Canadian Broadcast Corporation, accessed on October 31, 2022, https://globalnews.ca/news/8458351/canada-residential-schools-unmarked-graves-indigenous-impact/.

[112] "How Canada Forgot," The National Post, accessed October 7, 2022, https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/how-canada-forgot-about-more-than-1308-graves-at-former-residential-schools

unmarked graves Pope Francis' visited Canada in the summer of 2022 to offer a formal apology to the Indigenous people of Canada on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church.[113] Pope Francis' primary aim was to seek forgiveness from tribal elders for the way in which the unique culture of the Indigenous people of Canada was devalued and forcefully replaced by the European cultural norm and that was contrary to the message and way of Jesus Christ:

> "What our Christian faith tells us is that this was a disastrous error, incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is painful to think of how the firm soil of values, language and culture that made up the authentic identity of your peoples was eroded, and that you have continued to pay the price of this. In the face of this deplorable evil, the church kneels before God and implores his forgiveness for the sins of her children. I myself wish to reaffirm this, with shame and unambiguously. I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous Peoples."[114]

Pope Francis' apology was criticized by Indigenous elders for omitting any mention of the Church's institutional support of the policy of assimilation and for the churches religious justification of European colonial expansion to spread Christianity through the Doctrine of Discovery.[115] The Doctrine of Discovery which originated from a series of Papal Bulls (formal statements from the reigning Roman Catholic Pope) in the 1400s was used as a legal and moral justification for the dispossession of sovereign Indigenous peoples in what is now known as Canada.[116] This doctrine empowered European colonialists to view the Indigenous person as a *tabula rasa*; a person without a story, selfhood, or history, a blank slate upon which European

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[113] "The Pope's Apology," NPR, accessed August 23, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/07/28/1114207125/canada-pope-apology-Indigenous

[114] "Pope Francis Apology," The National Post, accessed September 19, 2022, https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/deplorable-evil-full-text-of-the-popes-residential-school-apology

[115] NPR, "The Pope's Apology."

[116] Erin Blakemore, "The 500-Year-Old Catholic Decree," *National Geographic*, July 22, 2022, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/doctrine-of-discovery-how-the-centuries-old-catholic-decree-encouraged-colonization.

values and culture could be impressed.[117] In our Canadian context, this cultural ethnocentrism justified the removal of over one hundred and fifty thousand Indigenous children from their homes to be placed in residential schools and the care of Euro-Canadian families. It was assumed that a European education and upbringing would enable the Indigenous child to become more civilized and acceptable for integration into European culture. While Canadians may be tempted to consider this history ancient, the last residential school, the Gordon Reserve Indian School in Saskatchewan, was formally closed in 1996, only twenty-six years ago.[118]

Lasting Trauma & the Loss of Culture

Today many Indigenous people suffer the detrimental effects of the trauma they endured through residential schools. These effects include a continuing cycle of poverty due to subpar education of Indigenous children who were ill equipped for the modern workforce.[119] In 2021, 11% of Indigenous people were unemployed in contrast to 7% of the rest of the Canadian population. This translates to 25% of Indigenous people living in poverty and 4 out of 10 Indigenous children living in poverty.[120] A second effect is that residential schooling placed the language, culture, and tradition of the Indigenous people at risk of disappearing.[121] During their schooling Indigenous children were forced to speak English, not permitted to wear traditional

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[117] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 15.

[118] "The Residential School System," Indigenous Foundations UBC, accessed October 11, 2022, https://Indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/.

[119] "Poverty in Canada," The Canadian Poverty Institute, accessed October 25, 2022, https://www.povertyinstitute.ca/poverty-

[120] "Poverty in Canada," The Canadian Poverty Institute.

[121] "4 Ways Residential Schools Continue to Impact Canada's Indigenous People," Global Citizen, accessed October 11, 2022, https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/4-impacts-residential-schools-indigenous-people/.

clothing, and to refrain from Indigenous customs in favor of Christian practices.[122] Woodley points out that when the Indigenous people were forced to assimilate into European culture by denying their culture, they were eventually left cultureless.[123] Today many indigenous youth cannot speak their indigenous language. Residential schools have also made a significant impact upon the mental health of indigenous people. Many of the children who attended residential schools were physically and sexually abused. Research conducted with residential school survivors indicate the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder characterized by anger, anxiety, depression, and mental distress.[124] These mental health challenges often have devastating outcomes. Statistics Canada reports that Indigenous people living on and off reserves commit suicide at twice the rate of the general population.[125] Sadly, research among residential school survivors also show that suicide spans generations; children of parents who experienced abuse have a one in five chance of committing suicide.[126] Today the Indigenous people continue to suffer the effects of what was done to their people as they struggle to find their place within the broader Canadian societal landscape. While more than half of the Indigenous population live on reserve land segregated from the rest of the Canadian population, most reserves lack adequate fresh water and sanitation infrastructure contributing to poor health and significantly higher mortality rates in comparison to the general population.[127]

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[122] Global Citizen, "4 Ways Residential Schools Continue to Impact Canada's Indigenous People."

[123] Woodley, *In Living Color*, 141.

[124] Global Citizen, "4 Ways Residential Schools Continue to Impact Canada's Indigenous People."

[125] "Suicide Among First Nations People," Statistics Canada, accessed October 25, 2022, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/99-011-x/99-011-x2019001-eng.htm.

[126] "Suicide Among First Nations People," Statistics Canada.

[127] "First Nations of Canada," Government of Canada, accessed April 30, 2021, https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1303134042666/1534961203322.

PRESENT REALITIES

TRUTH AWAITING RECONCILIATION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (hereafter TRC) was created in response to a legal settlement between Residential Schools Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives and the parties responsible for the creation and operation of these schools: the federal government and the church bodies.[128] Since 1973 more than forty 'truth commissions' have been established by the United Nations, governments and non-governmental organizations to enable reconciliation in various countries and contexts throughout the world.[129] The underlying conviction of the TRC is captured in the words of the late Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "There is no future without forgiveness."[130] The Canadian TRC was convened on June 1st, 2008 and was modelled after the post-Apartheid TRC of South Africa. The focus of the Canadian TRC was to provide those affected by the residential school system with the opportunity to share their stories and experiences.[131] The work of the TRC in South Africa drew worldwide attention because it included the granting of amnesty to anyone who made a full and public confession of criminal activity.[132] While the overarching aim of the TRC was to facilitate healing of the memories associated with the conflict during Apartheid to help the country move

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[128] "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, accessed October 7, 2022, https://nctr.ca/about/history-of-the-trc/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-of-canada/.

[129] Marcus Braybrooke, "No Future without Forgiveness," *Dialogue & Alliance* 26 no. 2 (2012) 67, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001928812&site=ehost-live.

[130] Braybrooke, "No Future without Forgiveness," 66.

[131] "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," Government of Canada, accessed on October 25, 2022, https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525.

[132] Braybrooke, "No Future without Forgiveness," 67.

forward, South Africa's approach was criticized for falling short of bringing about justice for victims.[133] Unlike the Nuremberg trials (1945–1949) following World War II, where former agents of the Nazi regime were put on trial, sentenced, and executed, the aim of TRC's has been to offer an alternative to Nuremberg's model for retributive justice.[134] A primary emphasis of Canada's TRC is to offer victims restorative justice which shifts the intention from punishing the offender to restoring the victim or the community.[135] The Restorative Justice Commission offers the following definition: "Restorative Justice works to resolve conflict and repair harm. It encourages those who have caused harm to acknowledge the impact of what they have done and gives them an opportunity to make reparation. It offers those who have suffered harm the opportunity to have their harm or loss acknowledged and amends made."[136] This restorative approach undergirded Canada's approach to truth and reconciliation. Fourteen years have passed since the Canadian TRC was convened and several of the recommendations the TRC made have yet to be acted upon by federal and provincial authorities. The final TRC report, released in 2015, concluded with a list of ninety-four calls to action. One of the calls to action is the mandatory inclusion of: "age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada," to be an educational requirement for kindergarten to grade twelve students."[137] Sadly, several Canadian provinces

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[133] Braybrooke, "No Future without Forgiveness," 67.

[134] Brenden Gooley, "Nuremberg or The South African TRC: A Comparison of the Retributive and Restorative Models of Justice" (Honors Scholar Thesis., University of Connecticut, Stamford Connecticut, 2012), 4, Open Commons @ UConn.

[135] Marian Liebmann, *Restorative Justice: How It Works* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007), 25.

[136] Liebmann, *Restorative Justice*, 25.

[137] Action 62 to 65 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Government of Canada, accessed August 24, 2022, https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524504501233/1557513602139.

have yet to implement such curriculum to combat the prevailing ignorance surrounding residential schools.[138] As the recent discovery of human remains on former church run residential school sites across Canada showed, many Canadians remain uneducated because this history has been omitted from school curriculums.

The "Western captivity" of Christianity that links the Christian faith with European and colonial identity and culture must give way to a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the Christian faith if we are to become open to the growing diversity within Western society. Second, cultural superiority undergirded by assimilationist approaches to Indigenous culture resulting in the subjugation and destruction of Indigenous people's God-given culture and way of life must end. The mistreatment and abuses Indigenous people suffered through residential schools run by Christian churches, serves as painful reminder and caution against the sin of cultural superiority and assimilation in the name of Christ. The lasting impact assimilation has made upon the Indigenous people of Canada today reveals itself in the numerous social ills and challenges they presently face. More must be done than acknowledging the past, efforts must be made by the government and the Church to act in restorative ways. Responding to the call for action presented in the final report of the TRC may be a good starting point for the government and Christian churches. While the majority people in the local church may not live in alternate cultures, sustained intercultural relationships could become a helpful means of challenging our tendency toward cultural superiority and idolatry.

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[138] "Education for Reconciliation," Government of Canada, accessed October 31, 2022, https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524504501233/1557513602139.

CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME FROM NAZARENES?

In 1960 Martin Luther King Jr. criticized the state of the American church when he said that "the 11th hour on a Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour of the week in Christian America."[139] Regrettably, this statement proves to be true of most evangelical churches in North America today including the Church of the Nazarene in Canada and the United States (USA/Canada region). Of the 5111 active Nazarene churches on the USA/Canada region, 97 (less than 2%) of these churches are considered Black and only 3.1% are considered multicultural (see Appendix A). A church is considered multicultural when no distinct racial group comprises more than 80% of its constituents. Sixty years removed from Dr. King's observation, much of the evangelical Church in North America remains segregated despite the significant population growth in diversity through immigration.[140]While racial segregation is no longer upheld by formal government policy, racial and cultural differences continue to serve as legitimizing factors for the ongoing segregation of people in worship.[141] Pew Research Centre reports that the total amount of foreign born persons residing in the United States reached a record 44.8 million, 13.7% of the U.S. population, in 2018.[142] Immigrant totals have more than quadrupled since the 1960's and despite a recent slowdown in growth the number of immigrants living in the United States is projected to nearly double by 2065.[143] Despite the societal growth

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[139] "Many U.S. Congregations Are Still Racially Segregated," Pew Research Centre, accessed October 31, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/08/many-u-s-congregations-are-still-racially-segregated-but-things-are-changing-2/.

[140] Pew Research Centre, "Still Racially Segregated."

[141] Pew Research Centre, "Still Racially Segregated."

[142] "Facts on U.S. Immigrants," Pew Research Centre, accessed October 8, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/20/facts-on-u-s-immigrants/.

[143] Pew Research Centre, "Facts on U.S. Immigrants."

through immigration, most evangelical churches in the Canada and the United States are in decline.[144] As the Canadian population grows through immigration more and more people are leaving the church. The rapid growth of the "Dones" (those who were once a part of a church but no longer show an interest in the church), the "Nones" (those who are unaffiliated from any formal religion), and those "who are spiritual but not religious," reveal a changing religious landscape characterized by "pluralism, fluidity, hybridity, and fragmentation."[145] Notably, in Canada the fastest growing segment within the religious landscape are those who claim no religious affiliation at all.[146]

ALL NATIONS, TRIBES, & TONGUES — BUT NOT HERE!

The Skyview Church is a part of the global Nazarene denomination whose conception was catalyzed by the Wesleyan Revival of the eighteenth century and the American Holiness Movement of the nineteenth century.[147] Busic captures the impetus of the denomination in its formative years well when he states: "Dissatisfied by internal dissensions, overly controlling ecclesial hierarchies, and controversies over doctrinal differences, Holiness leaders and laities turned their focus and energy toward those whom they deemed neglected at best, and forgotten at worst."[148] The Church of the Nazarene was birthed out of the dissatisfaction with existing

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[144] "The Canadian Census: A Rich Portrait of The Country's Religious and Ethnocultural Diversity," Statistics Canada, accessed on October 31, 2022, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.pdf?st=z8Y5gZrI.

[145] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *God's Mission,* 225.

[146] Statistics Canada, "The Canadian Census: A Rich Portrait."

[147] David A. Busic, *The City: Urban Churches in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition* (Kansas City: The Foundry Publishing, 2020), 23.

[148] Busic, *The City,* 23.

ecclesial bodies as a mission to the urban poor and outcast in the city. Consequently, the theological perspective reflected in the formation of the Nazarene denomination included a concern for the social dimension of people's lives regardless of their social status or race. Like Methodist Church Movement founders John and Charles Wesley, who became dissatisfied with the Church of England's lack of engagement with the common man in eighteenth century England, the early founders of the Nazarene church recognized the shortcomings of existing church bodies to engage the social dimensions of people's lives.[149] Like the Wesley's the early Nazarenes moved toward the places where the unchurched were to be found. In these formative years of the denomination "personal transformation accompanied social transformation" and was typified by the Nazarene's construction of "orphanages, homes for unwed mothers, city rescue missions, schools for immigrants, and working to support government legislation to bring about social change."[150] This ministry to the outcast and the immigrant in America's urban centers would place the early Nazarene's in proximity to people from diverse socio-economic and racial backgrounds and arguably reflected the very best of the holiness ethic, the central and defining theological doctrine within the Nazarene Church.[151] The very choice of the name, "The Church of the Nazarene," reflected the strong commitment of the pioneers of the denomination to link, "the toiling, lowly mission of Christ,' with the "struggling, sorrowing heart of the world."[152] To

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[149] Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 53.

[150] Busic, *The City,* 31.

[151] The Wesley's (John and Charles) ministry was similarly birthed out of the discontent with the existing Church of England and its lack of engagement with the common man. The Wesley's ministry was marked by engaging the people outside of the organized church and its buildings through field preaching and serving the poor and the marginalized through the establishment of schools and the provision of medical and compassionate care.

[152] Carl Bangs, *Phineas Bresee*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hills Press, 2013), 140.

be Nazarene in these early days was to approach humanity with the transforming hope of Jesus Christ in its personal and social dimensions.

Two Types of Nazarenes

All this began to change in the mid twentieth century as the church withdrew from urban centers following the end of the Jim Crow era.[153] The Jim Crow era (1877–1960s) was the name of the racial caste system that operated primarily in the southern and border states. Jim Crow laws prohibited Blacks from social, educational, and residential contact with Whites, restricted their movement, and ultimately legitimized anti-Black racism in the United States culminating in lynching and the imprisonment of thousands of African Americans.[154] Following the end of the Jim Crow era, churches who were initially drawn to the urban poor and marginalized in the cities, withdrew to the suburbs as Blacks, freed from laws restricting their movement, flocked north to urban centers for work.[155] The "Great Reversal," when the church withdrew from the city it once was drawn to, was fueled in large part by associated fears surrounding the impact growing racial diversity would have upon the primarily White church.[156] While "white flight" from urban centers was predicated upon various social factors, it was significantly fueled by fear

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[153] Stan Ingersol et al., *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2009), 525.

[154] "What was Jim Crow," Ferris State University, accessed October 8, 2022, https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/what.html.

[155] David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern* (Eugene Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 11, 30.

[156] Moberg, *The Great Reversal*, 30.

of the influence and impact of Blacks on the White church.[157] This fear contributed to the churches' exodus from urban centers and from the poor and racialized people, who lived there.

What becomes clear is that proximity to the marginalized (the poor and the immigrant) shaped Nazarene theology in these formative years. Fear of the impact of Blacks upon the wellbeing of Whites led to the church withdrawing from cities, and therefore from the poor and racialized people who lived there. As the church withdrew from urban centers the theological perspectives that held personal transformation and social transformation together bifurcated into two types of Nazarenes: "One that saved souls for heaven and another that worked to change earthly social structures."[158] This duality of theological perspective was further entrenched with the geographical shift of the church to the suburbs and rural America with a decreasing presence in urban centers.[159] Today there are more Nazarene churches in rural and suburban America and Canada than in urban centers and the city remains one of the largest and most racially diverse unreached mission fields in the USA/Canada region.[160]

BLACK PARTICIPATION

Brandon Winstead, in his important review of Black participation in the Church of the Nazarene from 1914 to 1969, shows that despite the church's withdrawal from the cities a minority of West Indians, Cape Verdeans, and African Americans joined the denomination and

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[157] Busic, *The City,* 39–40.

[158] Busic, *The City,* 33.

[159] Busic, *The City,* 33.

[160] Busic, *The City*, 34-35.

embraced its overall mission.[161] Winstead's work is unique and one of the only resources of its kind that tracks Black participation during one of America's most segregated eras (1914–1969). Winstead's work shows that while Black participation was limited, those who joined the Nazarene Church in America embraced the theological interest of the majority White church whose primary emphasis was the pursuit of personal piety and evangelism.[162] Notably, while a few Black participants within the denomination became socially active and engaged in the civil rights movement from the mid 1950's onward, the majority of Black participants avoided issues related to segregation and racial injustice.[163] Winstead states: "most in the denomination in the United States frowned upon social action as a form of holy living."[164] The formative perspective of the pioneers of the Nazarene denomination that held personal and social transformation as two sides of the same coin was lost. Winstead's work also shows no record of the Church of the Nazarene officially responding to the prevailing segregation and subjugation of Blacks in America, and with the exception of a few Black Nazarenes, the White majority church remained silent on matters of racial discrimination, segregation, and injustice.[165] Beals clarifies what the silence of the American Church during the Jim Crow era meant: "The churches befriended Jim Crow by holding the Negro status quo. Their silent apathy allowed and moved to take citizenship rights from Blacks."[166]The denomination's silence to Black oppression did not mean that there was no response to Black participation and consequently the first Colored District was

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[161] Brandon Winstead, *There All along: Black Participation in the Church of the Nazarene*, 1914–1969 (Lexington, Kentucky: Emeth Press, 2013), xvi.

[162] Winstead, *There All Along*, xiv–xv.

[163] Winstead, *There All Along*, xiv–xv.

[164] Winstead, *There All Along*, 107.

[165] Winstead, *There All Along*, xiv–xv.

[166] Ivan A. Beals, *Our Racist Legacy* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Cross Cultural Publications, 1997), 150.

established in 1947 as a segregated jurisdiction to govern African American churches.[167] None of the thirteen churches on the Colored District at that time exceeded 60 people and all legislative and executive power over these churches, their missions, and Sunday schools was held by White ecclesiastical leaders.[168] In response to why Black participation never grew beyond these modest numbers Winstead points out that Black Nazarene Churches reflected the average church membership reflected throughout Christian congregations in the United States at that time.[169] Average church membership in the United States was no more than 70 people in 1958 and by 1967 average membership within the congregation remained under 75.[170] According to Winstead this meant that Black participation, though modest, reflected the national average for church attendance across races and denominations. Yet, when one compares overall representation of Blacks to the numeric growth within the denomination, (Nazarenes grew from 10,090 members in 1908 to 378,070 in 1969) at its peak the denomination comprised no more than 1700 Black members in less than 55 predominantly Black congregations by the late 1960s.[171] In addition to this limited participation, for each district where a Black Nazarene Church resided White District Superintendents were placed in charge and made all the organizational and jurisdictional decisions regarding these congregations.[172] This administrative control extended to the licensing and ordination of Black ministers and continued throughout the duration of the Colored

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[167] Winstead, *There All Along*, 57.

[168] Winstead, *There All Along,* 56–57.

[169] Winstead, *There All Along*, 117.

[170] Winstead, *There All Along*, 117.

[171] Winstead, *There All Along*, xii–xiii.

[172] Winstead, *There All Along*, 57.

District.[173] Winstead explains that this "type of administrative governance discouraged African Americans from taking complete ownership over how Black evangelization would take place at the national level and afforded scarce opportunity to vote or speak on how African American churches were governed."[174] Despite having an interest in evangelizing Blacks, the denomination's compliance with laws of segregation and White control over Black churches and clergy limited Black participation to a segregated district with limited autonomy or self-determination.[175] Blacks continued to support traditional Nazarene ministries despite being placed under a segregated judiciary where they were not received as members with equal rights or privileges.[176]

A Mission to Africa but not to African Americans

Notably, the call to evangelize African Americans originated at the 1940 General Assembly when Dr. C. Warren Jones, the executive secretary of the Department of Home Missions, addressed the incongruence within a denomination focused on international cross-cultural mission and its reluctance to engage mission to African Americans at home in America:

> When it comes to the Negro race, we have done nothing. We have a few and a very few missions for the colored people, of which there are 12,000,000 in the United States. We have talked and promised ourselves to do something but that is as far as we have gotten. We seem to fail when it comes to consistency. We keep thirty-five missionaries in Africa and spend $40,000 a year to evangelize 1 1/3 million people and neglect the millions of the same face in the homeland. We would not do less for Africa, but do you not think we should do something for the Black man of our own land. They may be Black but they go

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[173] Winstead, *There All Along,* 57–59.

[174] Winstead, *There All Along*, 58.

[175] Winstead, *There All Along*, 58.

[176] Winstead, *There All Along*, 82.

to make up the human race (and) were surely included in the 'all nations' of the Great Commission."[177]

While the impulse for international mission grew the need to engage African Americans within America never culminated into the empowerment of Black Nazarenes to participate fully in the mission to reach African Americans.[178] Today the racial demographic makeup of the Church of the Nazarene on the USA/Canada region remains predominantly white English speaking and rural with limited Black participation despite its significant growth in the global South. Current statistics reveal that racial and cultural diversity is yet to be reflected proportionately on the local, district, and national levels on the USA/Canada region.[179]

The USA/Canada region of the Church of the Nazarene has never held a strong Black constituency despite its formative theological perspectives and its international mission across foreign cultures. While the international mission of the denomination was undertaken with a "consciousness of a world made up of many national identities, and hope that ethnocentrism could be transcended while respecting cultures and celebrating diversity;" it failed to embody such an ethic of cross cultural mission on the region for much of the twentieth century.[180] In more recent years denominational recognition and interest in cultivating stronger initiatives to reach minorities in the USA/Canada region included the establishment of the Multicultural Ministries Office. The mandate of the Multicultural Ministries Office in the USA/Canada region

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[177] Winstead, *There All Along,* 54.

[178] Winstead, *There All Along,* 54.

[179] "Multicultural Ministries," Church of the Nazarene USA/Canada, accessed October 20, 2022, https://www.usacanadaregion.org/multicultural-ministries.

[180] Stan Ingersol, Floyd Timothy Cunningham, Harold E Raser, and D P Whitelaw, *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2009), 525.

is to "support districts, pastors, local churches, and leaders in the task of making Christlike disciples among all ethnic groups in U.S. and Canada."[181] This office provides resources and support for the development of ethnic-specific and multicultural churches. In 2010 Faith Communities Today conducted a survey among Nazarene pastors across the USA/Canada region. In response to the statement, "Wants to be racially and culturally diverse:" 19% strongly agreed, 38% agreed, 32% were unsure, 9% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed.[182] While more than half of Nazarene pastors surveyed across the region expressed an interest in seeing their churches become racially and culturally diverse, the historical narrative and present-day statistics show that efforts have largely been unsuccessful.

SUMMARY

Who Does Theology Set the Parameters

James Massey explains that African Americans are largely absent from the 'American Holiness Movement,' which includes the Church of the Nazarene because they have been "grabbed by other currents of truth and meaning in Scriptures" that did not appeal to the White majority culture.[183] Massey clarifies that while African Americans were searching for a theology that would address their subjugated state during the civil rights era, such aspects of scriptural

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[181] Church of the Nazarene, "Multicultural Ministries."

[182] Faith Communities Today Survey 2010, The Association of Religion Data Archives, accessed November 15, 2022, https://www.thearda.com/ARDA/pdf/originalCodebooks/FACT%202010%20-%20Nazarene.pdf.

[183] James Earl Massey, "Race Relations and the American Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31 no.1 (Spring 1996): 44, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001011781&site=ehost-live.

theology were largely ignored within the American Holiness Movement.[184] Though Winstead shows that some Blacks within the Nazarene denomination sought to address matters of racial injustice, they were always the minority, not fully accepted, and functioned within a segregated district. Massey's insight that the absence of African Americans within the Holiness Movement was a product of the way the Bible was read and interpreted, alerts us to the reality that 'who does theology' and in whose interest theology is done, matters. Massey notes that the way the Bible was read in the Holiness Movement excluded engagement with the prophetic literature in scripture that spoke directly to the realities of liberation from enslavement and issues of justice that connects the witness of Scripture with the experience of African Americans.[185] The theological interest of the Nazarene denomination for much of the 20th century in America reflected biblical concerns for personal piety and evangelism that excluded matters of racial justice and social equality. The segregated participation of Blacks and their limited involvement in decision-making and governance within the Nazarene denomination for much of the 20th century, explains the absence of this group within much of the Nazarene Church in the USA/Canada region today.

Withdrawal Shapes Theological Perspectives

Thus far we have noted that the denomination's withdrawal from the city challenged and changed previously held theological perspectives underscoring the significance of proximity and place in shaping theological perspectives. A predominantly White middle-class church removed

[184] Massey, "Race Relations," 44.

[185] Massey, "Race Relations," 44–45.

from the poor and the racialized peoples in urban centers produced a theology of holiness that has historically excluded the non-white voice in addressing matters of racial injustice from a biblical perspective. Despite Winstead's noble effort to show Black participation in the USA/Canada region in the twentieth century, such participation was marked by a low percentage of Black involvement, defined by forces of segregation outside and inside the denomination, and theological interest that excluded concern for the oppression and segregation of Blacks in the United States in particular.

Practical Theology Responds to Relevant Issues

Goheen reminds us that the primary task of theology is to express "faith in relationship to the relevant issues of the day so that the church may fully and vividly take hold of the faith."[186] The historical development of the Church of the Nazarene in the USA/Canada region reveals the absence of a scriptural theology of justice during America's segregation era.[187] Similar to the founding impulse of the Nazarene church in the U.S., the Church of the Nazarene in Canada welcomed the evangelistic emphasis and focus on personal piety characteristic of the early American Church.[188] As the denomination in Canada expanded West, the same theological priorities that defined the denomination to the south were embraced by their northern neighbors. In Carl Bangs biography of Dr. P.F Bresee co-founder of the Nazarene denomination, he notes that Bresee was a man of his times who struggled over slavery, favored women's rights and was

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[186] Goheen and Wright, *Church and its Vocation,* 211.

[187] Winstead, *There All Along,* 107.

[188] Fred Macmillan, *Profiles of Faith: History of the Canada Atlantic District, Church of the Nazarene* (Kankakee, Illinois, Adcraft Printers, 1976), ii.

"spiritually attuned to many deep human currents at the turn of the century."[189] Following Bresee's visit to Calgary in 1912 he spoke optimistically about the prospects for the denominational expansion in Western Canada.[190] Despite Breese's theological concerns for social and personal equality, the Nazarene Church in Canada was primarily marked by Euro-Canadian adherents to the faith with no recorded engagement with the marginalized Indigenous population of Canada.

Today the Church of the Nazarene in Canada comprises 5 districts, just over 200 congregations, with a national average worship attendance of 6921 people.[191] The Canada Central District located in the province of Ontario comprises 57 churches and is the largest and most racially diverse district in Canada. Of the 57 churches on the district 21 are primarily Euro-Canadian, 24 are considered multicultural, and 12 are ethnic specific congregations.[192] Of the 57 churches 27 are led by Euro-Canadian pastors. While Canada Central District reflects growing diversity in leadership within the Nazarene denomination in Canada, they remain an anomaly in the Canada region. Skyview Church is located on the Canada West District which comprises 38 churches.[193] In Canada West District, 26 are majority Euro-Canadian churches, 7 are considered

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[189] Bangs, *Phineas Bresee,* 202–203.

[190] James Fred Parker, *From East to Western Sea: The Church of the Nazarene in Canada* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1971), 36.

[191] "About Us" Church of the Nazarene Canada, accessed August 31, 2022, https://www.nazarene.ca/about_us.

[192] Steve Ottley, District Superintendent of the Canada Central Church of the Nazarene, email correspondence with author, October 17, 2022.

[193] "Statistical Summary Report," The Church of the Nazarene, accessed on October 31, 2022, https://findachurch.nazarene.org/reports/.

multicultural, and 5 are ethnic specific.[194] Most of the Euro-Canadian congregations are located in rural settings and are in significant decline.[195]

As this review has shown, the Church of the Nazarene was birthed as a holiness church in an urban context with a mission that sought personal and social transformation for the urban poor and marginalized. Withdrawal from urban centers catalyzed by the end of an era of Black segregation, resulted in the bifurcation of the Nazarene Church into two strands of theological thought; those who held an evangelistic social concern and those committed to individualistic evangelism underpinned by fundamentalist theology.[196] Its birth and development in Canada was primarily shaped by the emphasis on evangelism and piety with no recorded engagement with the Indigenous people of Canada since its formation. While the denomination advanced a global missionary program successfully in the twentieth century, it failed to embody an ecclesial reality inclusive of the growing racial diversity in the USA/Canada region. Today the USA/Canada region reflects the ambiguity of being a part of a global denomination yet remains primarily monoracial in the USA and Canada.

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[194] Rose Brower-Young, District Superintendent of the Canada West Church of the Nazarene, email correspondence with author, October 15, 2022.

[195] Brower-Young, email correspondence.

[196] Busic, *The City,* 31.

CHAPTER 3: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

AT YOUR OWN TABLE

Historically, even when biblical interpretation has favored hospitality and inclusion of others, the fear of ethnic difference has prevailed over such perspectives. As a follower of Jesus Christ and a person of color who grew up during Apartheid South Africa (1948–1994) in a Nazarene pastor's home, my church experience was one of segregation and exclusion. This meant that I only worshipped with people from my racial class within Apartheid South Africa and was excluded from gathering in worship with other racial groups. A particular reflection upon South African church history reveals that the Church was not merely subject to political forces but complicit in the advancement of segregation despite biblical and theological perspectives to the contrary. One such example derives from the successful evangelization of native South Africans and indentured workers in the 19th century by the Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape Colony. As non-whites became followers of Jesus Christ the church faced a dilemma when its leaders discerned that the sacrament of holy communion was to be administered "simultaneously to all members without distinction of color of origin."[197] Despite their success in converting many Indigenous people to Christianity, racist perspectives and exclusive attitudes triumphed over biblical interpretation forcing the ruling council to pass the following resolution:

> The Synod considers it desirable and scriptural that our members from the Heathen be received and absorbed into our existing congregations wherever possible, but where this measure, as a result of the weakness of some, impedes the furtherance of the cause of

[197] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 13.

> Christ among the Heathen, the congregation from the Heathen, already founded and still to be founded, shall enjoy its Christian privileges in a separate building or institution.[198]

The Synod's decision to exclude the Indigenous and indentured converts to Christianity from sharing in holy communion with white congregants is considered to have laid the groundwork for policies of segregation that would eventually pave the way for the political system of racial segregation known as Apartheid.[199] This example shows us that despite the church's biblically informed understanding that Indigenous Blacks and indentured workers be "received and absorbed into existing congregations" on the merits of their Christian confession, they decided to exclude them due to the "weaknesses of some."[200] The "weaknesses of some," explains Ackermann, expresses the racist attitude present within the primarily White church and that prevailed over the biblical perspective that Christians irrespective of their race or ethnicity should be welcome at the Lord's Table. Today we look back on this decision as not only contributing to the formation of a segregated church but to laying the foundation for a segregated South African society.[201]

THE SLAVE BIBLE

A more blatant disregard for scriptural authority derives from the abridged work published in 1807 by the Society for the Conversion of Negro Slaves.[202] Here the Bible was redacted, through the intentional omission of much of the Old Testament and half of the New

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[198] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 13.

[199] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 13.

[200] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 13.

[201] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 13–15.

[202] Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism,* 35.

Testament, to ensure that enslaved Africans could be introduced to Christianity but not find within scripture anything that encouraged their pursuit of freedom.[203] This version of the Bible became known as the "Slave Bible" and was produced by British Christian missionaries to the West Indies who sought to teach African slaves to read with the ultimate goal of introducing them to the Christian faith.[204] While the "Slave Bible" is no longer in use and remains a relic of days gone by, the Bible is still read and taught selectively today. In research conducted by Edmondson and Brennan they show that even when Evangelical Christians in America acknowledge that racial injustice is a problem and that the Bible does address such matters, they often considered other moral issues as having a higher priority.[205] Today the Church does not need a redacted version of the Bible to exclude the scriptural call for justice, equality, inclusion and reconciliation: we can simply choose to ignore or deprioritize these aspects within the Bible. With these challenges in mind, we now turn to select portions of scripture to discern what it may have to say to us about the Church and its inclusion of diverse others. Beginning with the Old Testament account of Jonah we will discern God's intention for Israel in relation to cultural others. As Acts contains the birth story of the first Christian church and the implicit challenges the first Christians faced as the church grew beyond Jewish culture, it is particularly pertinent to our understanding of the problem as it relates to the development of an intercultural ministry framework for the local church today.

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[203] Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism,* 35.

[204] Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism,* 36.

[205] Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Anti-Racism,* 31.

> "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord"
>
> (Jonah 1:1–3).

A biblical consideration of the problem of difference is to be found in the Old Testament account of the prophet Jonah. The prophet's perspective of the people of Nineveh parallels Israel's relationship to pagan nations. Israel's identity following their exodus can be understood as a process of defining themself over and against pagan nations. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 B.C.[206] While scholarly opinion varies on the date Jonah was written, the book assumes the existence of Nineveh as a great and wicked city.[207] Jonah's ministry most likely occurred prior to the rise of Assyria as a powerful empire under Tiglath-pilesar III in the latter part of the eighth century.[208] The book of Jonah begins with the commissioning of the prophet: "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me" (Jonah 1:2). Jonah disobeys God's command and hastily flees by boat in the opposite direction to Tarshish. While sailing, a storm threatens to sink the boat and when it comes to light that Jonah's disobedience was the cause of the storm, he is reluctantly tossed overboard. He is fortuitously swallowed by a large fish and in the belly of the fish recommits himself to fulfilling the promise he had made to God (Jonah 1:17; 2:9). After

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[206] Robert Branson et al., *Discovering the Old Testament: Story and Faith,* ed. Alex Varughese (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2003), 352.

[207] Branson et al., *Discovering the Old Testament,* 352.

[208] Branson et al., *Discovering the Old Testament*, 352.

three days, the fish spews Jonah out onto dry land. He travels to Nineveh and there proclaims the impending judgement against that city (Jonah 3:1–3). When all of Nineveh, including their king, repents, God relents from passing judgment upon them and Jonah reacts in anger:

> "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live (Jonah 3:10–4:3).

Several views exist concerning the central message of the book and Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh. In one perspective, Jonah is viewed as symbolizing Israel, who like their ancestor Abraham, was called to be a blessing to other nations: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3b).[209] In this perspective Jonah's time spent in the belly of the big fish is interpreted in light of Israel's captivity and Jonah's bigotry toward Nineveh reflective of Israel's exclusive attitude toward non-Jews following their restoration from exile.[210] McLaughlin asserts that the central message of the text is then "a critique of Israel's nationalistic disdain for non-Israelites, a disdain epitomized in the exclusivism found in the reforms of Ezra."[211] Here Jonah

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[209] Charles W. Carter, *Wesleyan Bible Commentary: Isaiah–Malachi (Volume III)* (USA: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1969), 660.

[210] Carter, *Isaiah–Malachi*, 660.

[211] Ryan P. McLaughlin, "Jonah and The Religious Other: An Exploration of Biblical Inclusivism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 72, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001940701&site=ehost-live.

as prophet, is considered a representative of Israel who, following her exile developed a "narrow and exclusive tendency toward Gentile nations."[212]

While the biblical account of Jonah emphasizes the mercy God extends to outsiders, it is impossible to ignore the prophet's disdain for the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:10–4:3).[213] While God's response to their repentance is to forgive, Jonah's response to the mercy of God is regret and anger. Jonah reveals that his reluctance to go to Nineveh is rooted in his awareness of God's willingness to extend mercy and grace to Nineveh: "Whereas some prophets shrank from preaching because they saw no hope, Jonah refuses because he knows there is hope."[214] Simply stated, Jonah did not wish to preach to Nineveh for fear that the God of Israel would relent from punishing them.

PAGAN INSIGHT

Reading Jonah as symbolic of Israel's reluctance to fulfil her calling to be a light unto other nations also draws attention to the positive potential that the other possesses within the narrative. Israel, as God's chosen people, defined herself against two broad categories of the other.[215] The first is the elect over the anti-elect. The anti-elect are enemies of God whom Israel as elect is commanded to annihilate (Num. 14:42–45).[216] The second is the non-elect who are

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[212] McLaughlin, "Jonah," 72.

[213] For an alternate reading and interpretation of Jonah see Yitzhak Berger**,** *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden* (Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016).

[214] Phyllis Trible, *Jonah The New Interpreter's Bible VII* (Nashville Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1996), 481.

[215] Zev Garber. "The 'Other' in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 480–482, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=rlh&AN=83332646&site=ehost-live.

[216] Garber, "The 'Other'," 481.

included as participants in the divine plan and with whom "Israel was to work out her destiny in relation to them, even if in separation from them."[217] McLaughlin views the captain of the boat and the king and people of Nineveh as non-elect who fear Israel's God and as possessing insight into the mercy and gracious character of Jonah's God.[218] During the tempestuous storm the captain of the boat awakens Jonah and implores him to: "Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish" (Jonah 1:6). Similarly, the king of Nineveh pleads: "Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish" (Jonah 3:9). McLaughlin proposes that the book of Jonah then "offers a helpful vision of religious inclusivism in which the religious other not only is in a genuine relation with the divine but also reveals the divine to those that consider her or him to be other."[219]

Such a reading of Jonah shows that Israel's God extends mercy beyond Israel to the non-elect people of Nineveh. Jonah, like Israel, played a key role in revealing divine mercy despite personal prejudice and reluctance to do so. If one reads Jonah as symbolic of Israel, the narrative becomes a warning to Israel to fulfil her calling to be a blessing and a light unto other nations (Gen. 12:1–3; Isa. 42:6; 49:6).[220] In this sense, Jonah's disobedience threatens more than his relationship with God: it threatens his identity as a son of Abraham and a faithful member of God's covenant community Israel. God's choice of Israel is better thus understood as an "act of grace and not of partiality, which required a response of obedient service, not of willful

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[217] Garber, "The 'Other'," 481.

[218] McLaughlin, "Jonah," 72.

[219] McLaughlin, "Jonah," 72.

[220] Tremper Longman III, et al., *Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 965–967.

complacency."[221] Jonah's decision to exclude Nineveh was contrary to God's purpose for Israel and Jonah's engagement with the other is essential to fulfilling his calling as God's chosen representative. This view of Jonah anticipates the inclusion of Gentiles as expressed in the New Testament through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the birth of the early church.

THE ONLY SIGN JESUS GIVES

In response to the demand from Israel's religious leaders for a sign that would prove his identity and so doing make his divine authority clear, Jesus Christ offers the life and events of Jonah as a response:

> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will rise-up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here! (Matt. 12:38–41).

Most interpretations of what Jesus intends when he references Jonah as a sign have focused upon the comparison between Jonah's time spent in the belly of the fish and the time Jesus would spend in the tomb.[222] In this perspective, Jonah's time spent in the belly of the fish and his reluctance to preach to a repentant Nineveh is contrasted with Jesus who in willful obedience to the Father endures the cross and enables the salvation of all following his resurrection.[223] Significant is the implication that through the death and resurrection of Jesus,

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[221] Ajith Fernando, *Acts, From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life: The NIV Application Commentary:* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 334.

[222] Eugene M. Boring, *Matthew: The New Interpreters Bible Commentary VIII* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 296.

[223] Longmann, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 966–967.

God is revealed as the one who extends mercy to all people and not just Israel. Israel's Savior is to be the Savior of all people and the reference to Jonah as a sign given by Jesus is then understood as a warning against Israel's prevailing bigotry, intolerance and prejudice which persisted even in Jesus' day.[224] As God's mercy had already been extended and received by non-elect people such as the people of Nineveh; the same mercy is now revealed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and in the Gospel of Matthew in particular.[225] This mercy driven inclusivity is extended to Gentiles throughout the book of Acts and presents the first Christian followers with the challenge and opportunity to include non-Jews in the formation of the first Christian community.

THE BIRTH OF SOMETHING NEW

> So, when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
>
> (Acts 1:6–8).

The Bible is first a story about a particular people before it is a story about all people. The descendants of Abraham were chosen by God to be a light unto the nations revealing through their covenant faithfulness the one true God of Isaac and Jacob (Isa. 49:6). The Jewish people viewed themselves as chosen of God and such election was characterized by distinguishing themselves from pagan others by maintaining their distance and so doing keeping themselves

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[224] Ralph Earle, *Beacon Bible Commentary, Volume 6: Matthew through Luke* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), 127–128.

[225] Joe Kapolyo, *"Matthew," in Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1136.

undefiled (Ezek. 36:22–29). Their election also shaped Jewish expectations regarding the advent of a Jewish Messiah who vindicates Israel from her enemies and restores Israel from their exilic past to its sovereign rule. Yet, when the Jewish Messiah Jesus arrives, his ministry and message would not meet such revolutionary expectations. In his introduction to the book of Acts Jennings notes that: "The interruption in Acts was not the destruction of Jewish identity, but many of those in the story perceived it as such."[226] He further explains that Acts offers an interruption to Jewish expectation for national restoration and its accompanying claim that belonging to the elect is the primary qualification to entering into the family of God.[227] Jennings sees in Acts an alternative image of God's chosen people who are no longer included or excluded on the basis of Jewish ethnicity but a new community of people, made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the response of faith. This new community is first realized through the coming together of Jew and Gentile in a way neither group anticipated nor sought through the leading of the Spirit of God (Acts 10:46–48; 11:3). Peterson reminds us that in Acts, the birth of this new community, the Christian Church, is ultimately the work of the Spirit of God.[228] Just as the Spirit of God is operative at the conception of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:35; 41,42), so is the Spirit operative at the conception of the first Christian Church (Acts 2:1–4). The same Spirit who birthed Christ births the Church; a people no longer separated by culture and ethnic boundaries, but a people included within the ever-expanding Christian community through faith in the Jewish Messiah Jesus. The implications for the Jewish Christ

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[226]Willie James Jennings, *Acts: Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 8.

[227] Jennings, *Acts*, 8.

[228] Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 35.

followers were significant and radically challenged their Jewish self-understanding and their exclusive perspectives concerning Gentiles (Acts 11:2–3).

THE FIRST CHURCH

The narrative of Acts begins with an instruction by the resurrected Jesus for his disciples "not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father … for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4–5). Jesus' instruction to his disciples to wait is significant because the Spirit will empower a different redemptive reality than the one they were anticipating.[229] Their nationalistic ambition limited their view of Christ's mission to the social and political restoration of Israel; they hoped that the new age of the Spirit would be about restoring Israel's sovereignty (Acts 1:6).[230] But the age of the Spirit would disrupt such expectations and instead empower disciples to seek the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated. As they wait, the Spirit of God descends upon them at Pentecost and they are empowered to become witnesses to the resurrected Messiah in the 'mother tongue' of all Jews gathered in Jerusalem: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" (Acts 2:4). Jennings comments that the "Miracle of Pentecost is less in the hearing and much more in the speaking. Disciples speak in the mother tongue of others, not by their own design but by the Spirit's desire."[231] Jennings makes an important observation, the disciples did not initiate the miracle of tongues, but God did

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[229] Robert W. Wall, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 30.

[230] F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts, Revised* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 35.

[231] Jennings, *Acts*, 27.

so by his Spirit. As the narrative of Acts unfold, we will see that God's plan to include others would prove to be a challenge for the fledgling Jewish church. Yet, the promise of Jesus to his disciples concerning the empowerment from God is now being realized by the Spirit who enables disciples to speak in the native tongues of all the elect gathered in Jerusalem. Instead of having everyone understand the language of the disciples, the disciples are empowered to translate the message of Christ into the "mother tongues" of the Jews gathered before them (Acts 2:5). This gift of translation reveals that in God's provision of the Spirit, those who are called to bear witness to diverse others, are empowered to communicate the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in the native tongue of the hearers. Importantly, the agent for such translation is God himself who through the giving of the Spirit enables a group of Jewish followers of Jesus to translate the message into the multi-lingual context of those present within Jerusalem.

JEW FIRST THEN THE "OTHER"

> "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is God's saving power for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"
>
> (Rom. 1:16).

The diversity of the recipients of the disciple's ministry following the outpouring of the Spirit of God in Acts 2 did not include Gentiles. Those who heard the message of Jesus in their native tongue were primarily Jews from surrounding regions, who spoke different languages, and who were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (Acts 2:5).[232] The unfolding narrative of Acts will show that as the Spirit of God empowers the witness of the disciples the early church continues to grow through Gentile conversion along with increasing hesitation and concern for

[232] Bruce, *New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, Acts, 53.

their inclusion by the predominately Jewish Jerusalem Church (Acts 11:2–3). Notably, though the first Pentecost results in the conversion of a diversity of ethnic Jews, their shared Jewish heritage enables their inclusion without concern in the church of Christ (Acts 2:38–41). What becomes clear as the narrative unfolds is that what began in Jerusalem with the conversion of the Jews, will not only remain in Jerusalem, but is intended to extend to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). From the outset, the pivotal role of the Spirit is to move the disciples beyond their nationalistic exclusivity to embrace a mission inclusive of those whom they would not have chosen to include. However, that mission began with the restoration of Israel to its calling to become a light unto the nations through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the twelve Jewish disciples in Acts chapter two. While the Spirit plays an operative role in empowering the 'gift of tongues' the Spirit also plays a liberating and overcoming function helping the disciples to embrace that which would not come naturally. It is important to note that the Jewish followers of Jesus in Acts remained Jewish and that the birth of the early church did not diminish God's choice of Abraham's family, the people historically known as Israel. Pentecost restored God's choice of Abraham's descendants to their divine calling: to extend God's salvation to the ends of the earth.[233] Yet, as Acts unfolds, we see that without the Spirit's intervention the mission may not have happened as the disciples grappled with Gentile inclusion: "Acts renders the Gentiles as a profound question to the Jews of diaspora: What will you do if I join you at the body of Jesus and fall in love with your God and you."[234]

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[233] N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World Workbook: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 377.

[234] Jennings, *Acts*, 8.

> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine"
>
> (Acts 2:12–13).

While everyone heard the message of the resurrected Jesus in their mother tongue, not everyone understood what this meant: (Acts 2:12–13). In response to their confusion and cynicism Peter responds to the crowd by making it clear that they were not drunk, but by the Spirit of God were now fulfilling what God had always intended for his people to accomplish. Peter, filled with the same Pentecostal Spirit, now sees in the prophetic voice of the Old Testament prophet Joel the anticipation of what is now happening at Pentecost (Joel 2:28–32).[235] Peter sees through Pentecost the fulfillment of God's promises that in the "last days he will pour out His Spirit on all flesh" (Acts 2:17). This looking back to the Old Testament and seeing God's fulfillment of what he had promised in a way that previously escaped the disciple's imagination will become a significant means of discerning that Gentile inclusion was always a part of God's redemptive plan. Both Peter (Acts 2:16–21) and James (Acts 15:13–18) will see the movement of the Spirit beyond Israel as the fulfillment of prophecy and justification for Gentile inclusion. Significantly, while Peter sees in Joel's prophecy the promise of the Spirit poured out upon "sons and daughters…young and old, male and female slaves" (Acts 2:16–17), he is not as yet able to discern that such prophecy will extend beyond the Jews of the diaspora to include even Gentiles until he enters the home of the Gentile Cornelius.

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[235] Bruce, *New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, Acts, 60–61.

> "Now the apostles and the brothers and sisters who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So, when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?"
>
> (Acts 11:1–4)

The pericope that begins in chapter ten of the book of Acts culminates in these words: "When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). What precipitates the Jewish Jerusalem Churches' recognition that Gentiles were to be included in God's family is the personal transformation and witness of Peter following his encounter in the home of the Gentile Cornelius. Peter becomes a catalyst for Gentile inclusion within the larger Jewish church by the initiative and leading of God's Spirit. However, Peter needed the Spirit of God to lead him toward the Gentile other. While Peter is praying and hungry, he falls asleep and receives a vision of a sheet descending from heaven: "In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean (Acts 10:12–14)." The vision Peter receives is one that challenges him to eat that which he considered unlawful for a Jew to consume. The vision, which comes from God, is intended to prepare Peter for table fellowship with those whom he would have formerly excluded for fear of becoming unclean. Following the vision and an accompanying invitation to go to Cornelius' house, Peter witnesses that the same Spirit that fell upon the Jews in Jerusalem, also fell upon Cornelius and his household and Peter's eyes are opened to see that God accepts all people: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him, and practices righteousness

is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all" (Acts 10:34–36).

The significance of Peter's transformation is easily lost on the modern reader when we fail to consider the ways in which he was culturally conditioned to think and act in exclusive ways. Like most of Jesus' early followers, Peter saw Jesus in light of Jewish Messianic anticipation concerning the restoration of Israel. There is no indication in the Gospels that Peter considered his Jewish cultural identity and religious practices to be an obstacle to following Jesus or to the Messianic hope.[236] Peter responded to the invitation of Jesus to become his disciple and remained faithful to his Jewish culture and religious practices by observing the sabbath, adhering to the Torah, and obeying accompanying commands including dietary laws prohibiting the consumption of certain foods deemed unclean.[237] These dietary restrictions not only served as an identity marker setting Peter apart as a member of God's elect but also set him apart from social engagement and table fellowship with Gentiles. Significantly, despite Peter's restoration by Jesus following his denial of Christ (John 21:15–21), the outpouring of God's Spirit upon Peter and the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–4), his powerful proclamation of the message of Jesus and the subsequent repentance of thousands (Acts 2:41–42), the healing of the lame by the power of the Spirit (Acts 3:1-10), Peter had not yet grasped the inclusive dimensions of God's redemptive mission to Gentiles (Acts 10:14). As much as the Spirit of God had accomplished in Peter's life, he was yet to see the full extent of God's plan of salvation. The vision, which prepared Peter for his encounter with Cornelius, served to liberate Peter from a

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[236] Jennings, *Acts,* 108.

[237] Jennings, *Acts,* 107.

perspective of God's election of a people. It opened his eyes to the reconciliatory mission of God extended to all people including the Jews. The revelation here is that Peter needed God's Spirit to move him beyond his culturally conditioned view of God and others. Without the Spirit's outpouring and invitation, Peter would have remained blind to God's inclusive mission.

Transforming entrenched religious perspectives does not come easily to anyone. Peter rebuffs God's command to kill and eat repeatedly (Acts 10:14–16) clarifying that he has never eaten anything unclean (Acts 10:13–16). Peter's response is rooted in an understanding of election as a son of Abraham that is maintained through abstaining from certain foods condemned as unclean and those who ate unclean food. Notably, despite God's admonition to not judge anything unclean that God has made clean, Peter does not grasp the divine plan until he witnesses the Spirit of God fall upon Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44–48). Peter's transformation is wrought by God through the leading and outpouring of the Spirit, the primary agent for transformation throughout the book of Acts (Acts 1:18, Acts 2:1–10, Acts 3). It is the Spirit of God who gave Peter a vision for that which he previously could not stomach and who prepares Cornelius to receive his word. It is the Spirit who enables Peter to see that which his cultural and religious past kept him from seeing. It is the Spirit of God who enables Peter to move away from his former exclusive perspective of the Gentile and to bear witness to the Jewish Jerusalem Church for Gentile inclusion. Marzouk sees Peter's transformation in the home of Cornelius as his true conversion: "a paradigm shift, not only in his understanding of who God is and of who Peter is as a human being, but also who the other is."[238] What the Spirit sought was not just to change the former perspectives of Peter, but to bring Peter into an encounter with the

[238] Marzouk, *Intercultural Church*, 35.

other so that he may see the other as equally chosen by God. The command of Jesus in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," is now being fulfilled in the home of Cornelius.

GOOD TROUBLE IN THE CHURCH

Keener notes that the conversion of Cornelius represents a paradigm shift for inclusion into God's family: "a Roman officer is welcomed into God's family without being circumcised (i.e., without converting to ethnic Judaism in the way prescribed by law and tradition)."[239] Important here is the observation that inclusion into God's family was initiated by God through His Spirit and did not require Cornelius or his household to convert through circumcision or Torah observance, which was the prerequisite for Gentile inclusion into Judaism. Peter's presence in the home of Cornelius serves as a witness to Peter that not only is God including non-Jews, but he is including them as their Gentile selves. It should not surprise us that the very church who praised God for Gentile inclusion in Acts 11 following Peter's testimony now struggles with the implications of their inclusion based upon the perspective that Jews were the chosen people of God. To belong, Gentiles must become God-fearing Jews. Notably, when the Spirit was poured out on the disciples in Acts 2 and through their witness and the message of Peter thousands of diaspora Jews were saved and their inclusion into the fellowship and community of Christ was not conditional. According to scripture these men and women joined the disciples in prayer, reading scripture, eating together, and worshipping together (Acts 2:42–

[239] Craig S. Keener, *Acts: New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 293.

47). The insistence by the Jerusalem Church that Gentile Christians become Jews first through circumcision and Torah observance, reveals the ethnocentric perspective that inclusion into God's family is conditioned by assimilation into Judaism: "But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:4–5). Thus, the necessity of conversion to Judaism is emphasized as an imperative for inclusion into the Christian community. LeBlanc sees that what is in mind here is a culture surrounding the Torah and circumcision; conformity to a cultural framework and not just circumcision and Torah observance is what is expected.[240] Bosch explains that the Jerusalem Churches' "concern was not mission, but consolidation; not grace, but law; not crossing frontiers, but fixing them; not life, but doctrine, not movement but institution."[241] At stake in the quest for conformity to a Jewish cultural framework is control over these Gentile Christians by the Jewish Church: "At one level we should understand this as cultural alignment of identity and theological alignment, but at another level it was an alignment of identity and story for the purpose of control."[242] This pattern of conditioned acceptance (assimilation) into a dominant cultural frame has defined Christian engagement with Indigenous people who were expected to become like the European in order to become acceptable. Today the Christian Church may not operate with such overt assimilative purpose, but immigrants are often expected to sacrifice what is unique and God-given about their culture and identity and to

[240] Terry LeBlanc, Nazarene Theological Seminary Orjala Lectureship: "Mission Then & Mission Now!," October 11, 2022, lecture, 4:54:54, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRewYCIAOSw.

[241] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of* Mission (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 51.

[242] Jennings, *Acts*, 140.

assimilate to the cultural values and practices of the dominant culture in order to find acceptance and a voice within the church.

The conversion of Cornelius and his household was significant in that they became a part of God's family without converting to ethnic Judaism in the way prescribed by law and tradition.[243] But, as more Gentiles become followers of Christ, the cultural assimilation of these new converts become a source of contention within the predominantly Jewish church. Jennings rightly alerted us to the intention behind such assimilation, it was not just about conformity to Jewish culture and religious perspectives, but about power and control over Gentiles.[244] Upon Paul and Barnabas return to Jerusalem they testify to how Gentile conversion was "received with great joy by all believers" as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria (Acts 15:3). The joy of Gentile conversion was not shared by those in the Jerusalem Church, who insisted upon circumcision and Torah observance, which prompted Peter to respond:

"My brothers, you know 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 the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us, and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (Acts 15: 7b – 11).

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[243] Keener, *Acts,* 293.

[244] Jennings*, Acts,* 140.

The Holy Spirit's outpouring in the home of Cornelius opened Peter's eyes to God's inclusion of Gentiles. Peter understood that Gentile inclusion was not based on an external adherence to circumcision and Torah observance but a gift of God to all who would receive such grace in faith (Acts 15:9). Based on Peter's testimony and the witness of Paul and Barnabas, James now reads the Jewish scripture in a new light: "so that all other peoples may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago" (Acts 15:17). The Old Testament references that James reinterprets include a pastiche mostly from Amos 9:11–12 LXX, Jeremiah and Isaiah, which he now sees in a provocatively new light as having the other in mind.[245] Based upon the witness of Peter, Barnabas and Paul, as well as his rethinking of the Old Testament prophecies, James recommends that a letter be sent to Gentile Christians clarifying what is essential to Christian living: "abstaining from eating anything offered to idols, from fornication, any animals strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:10). The Jerusalem Church agrees, and a letter is sent to Gentile believers freeing them from any imposition other than what was considered essential (Acts 15:28).

SUMMARY

Including the Other is Unnatural

From our review of Acts, we discern the significance of the Spirit of God who empowered and lead the church toward the inclusion of others. The tendency to think that the

[245] Wall, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Acts*, Vol. 9, 171–172.

inclusion of racial and ethnic others should feel natural or happen without any discomfort to prevailing worldviews within the Church is not what the Acts narrative reveals. The Spirit of God works intentionally to reveal God's purpose by orienting disciples to embrace a mission beyond Jerusalem and beyond Jewish self-interest. In this sense, the Spirit of God can also be understood as an agent of revolution seeking to overturn cultural superiority and religious resistance to Gentile inclusion by restoring Israel to her primary calling, to be a light unto the nations. The Spirit is then disruptive to long-held ways of thinking that place the burden of cultural assimilation upon non-Jewish adherents to the Christian faith. Just as Peter had to concede his resistance to abstaining from certain foods and people, the Jerusalem Church needed to concede the requirement of circumcision and Torah observance for Gentile inclusion. In both examples, resistance was significant as it was rooted in a history and religious perspective that defined Jewish self-understanding and messianic expectations for generations. The intercultural church seeking to include the diversity of people within contemporary Canadian society, should likewise anticipate opposition from within the existing church to the inclusion of others. Such opposition will need to be overcome through the power of God's Spirit, a fresh vision for fellowship with those we have formerly excluded, and obedience to the calling of God to make disciples of all nations.

Catalysts are Needed!

Peter's transformation anticipates the transformation of the larger Jerusalem Church into a community open to the inclusion of Gentiles. The transforming work of God in the life of Peter is therefore to be understood as a part of God's larger transforming missionary agenda. In Western society, individualism often infiltrates perspectives of the Christian life leading to a

failure to discern that God's interest is in forming a people, not just individual persons to be his representatives in the world he has made. We see that the experience of Peter in the home of Cornelius serves a greater purpose than Peter anticipated. His encounter with Cornelius will become the source of his testimony to the Jerusalem Church to discern God's inclusion of Gentiles. Peter does not become a catalyst for change without personally experiencing such change. The power of his testimony is rooted in what he has seen and what he now understands, and that previously alluded him. As a catalyst Peter's primary task is to bear witness to the activity of God in the other. In doing so Peter is revealing to the Jerusalem Church a perspective of God that is greater than they had anticipated. Through Peter, the Jerusalem Church would catch a glimpse of the breadth of God's saving plan that extends beyond Jews and now includes Gentiles.

Divine Initiative Requires Human Response

Importantly, while the Spirit of God is the catalyst for transformation, human response matters. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas must respond to the prompting and leading of the Spirit of God who takes them to people they would not have chosen to include. Like the early church in Acts 15, many churches today face the same challenge that successful cross cultural missionary activity creates, people unlike them becoming followers of Christ. The Jerusalem Church under the leadership of James, after hearing Peter's testimony responded to the challenge by discerning God's plan for Gentile inclusion from scripture and by denying the impulse to place anything more upon Gentiles than was essential. While the Spirit enabled Peter to become a witness and therefore a catalyst for change, God did not work independent of Peter or the Jerusalem Church itself but invited them to participate in the mission of God. Similarly, the church desiring to

become an intercultural church must not only be discerning of what scripture reveals but must be responsive to what this requires as they relate to cultural others.

Prejudice is Overcome in the Presence of the Other

What may be easily overlooked in our review of the encounter between Peter and Cornelius is that these two men were brought into relationship with one another. Despite their cultural, religious, ethnic, and racial differences, Peter would see Cornelius in ways he had not anticipated. Prior to meeting Cornelius Gentiles were non-elect, excluded from fellowship and communion with Jews and their God. Following his encounter with Cornelius in his home, Gentiles were recipients of God's Spirit and welcomed into the family of God without Jewish cultural assimilation. Most importantly, Cornelius helped reveal God to Peter in a way that Peter had not yet seen. The God Peter apprehends in the home of Cornelius chooses non-Jews also. Yet, such revelation would escape Peter if he had not stepped into the home of Cornelius where he witnessed the Spirits outpouring upon Gentiles. The same argument could be advanced when we consider the testimony of Paul and Barnabas when they silenced the wrestling Jerusalem Church: "The whole assembly kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:12). It was when they were among the Gentiles that they understood the activity and presence of the God of the Abraham and gained a fuller picture of the God who works indiscriminately within cultures unlike their own. The concern raised by the Jerusalem Church regarding Peter eating with Gentiles is a concern raised by those who have yet to come close enough to see the activity of God in the other. The significance of proximity to the other is needed for true transformation as

prejudicial and exclusive attitudes are not overcome when we remain distant from engagement with the other.

Reading Scripture Responsibly

Following the death and resurrection of Jesus the disciples had to learn how to read the Old Testament scriptures differently (Luke 24:27; Acts 15:16–17). One such example comes from Luke's gospel when Cleopas and his fellow disciple were leaving Jerusalem following the crucifixion of Jesus (Luke 24:24–35). Dismayed by his death which marked the end of their hope for Israel's restoration, Jesus joins them on their walk and chastises them for failing to see that the suffering Messiah was always a part of the scriptural witness: "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter his glory? Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:24–27). Here Jesus reveals to his disciples that the scriptures they knew have always pointed to a Messiah that would suffer and die and then enter into his glory. While they knew the scripture, they failed to see the revelation of a crucified and resurrected Jesus. Similarly, the disciple's knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures did not imply anticipation of Gentile inclusion. Just as Jesus opens the eyes of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Spirit enables the disciples in Acts to see the inclusion of Gentiles in their scriptures.

We began our biblical review of the problem of difference by reflecting on the way in which the Bible was used selectively and often ignored in relation to the equality and inclusion of racialized people. As the Bible plays such a formative role in the life of the church, reading it responsibly will become essential within the intercultural Church. As people come from different

cultural experiences with various interpretive perspectives of scripture, the task of translating the message of the Bible for life today becomes one of the most significant tasks of pastors and teachers seeking to address matters of injustice and exclusion of others. Importantly, just as the Western Church has culturally appropriated the Christian faith, the Bible has been read through a Euro-centric lens that has excluded the perspectives and cultural experiences of racialized people. In recent years postcolonial biblical studies have gained appeal as biblical interpreters seek to read scripture in ways that depart from this dominant view. This approach to biblical studies assumes that the Bible has always been interpreted through a dominant cultural lens and that " all biblical interpretation subscribes to cultural codes, thought patterns and the social location of its interpreter."[246] While this approach to biblical interpretation is needed, the key objective is to: "minimize and eventually eradicate the epistemological violence of the colonial encounter, the legacy of which still lingers on in biblical studies"[247] The task of theology is then to bring a responsible reading of scripture into conversation with the prevailing challenges and opportunities diversity presents the local church. It is to this task we now attend.

Theological Perspectives

Nieman notes that congregations often face challenges to their identity for a variety of reasons.[248] While he attributes this to the changing role of the church in society, multiple

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[246] Jeremy Punt. "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in South Africa: Some Mind and Road Mapping." *Neotestamentica* 37 no. 1 (2003), 80, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001978873&site=ehost-live.

[247] Punt, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," 80–81.

[248] James Nieman. "Attending Locally: Theologies in Congregations," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 6 no. 2 (2002): 198,

religious alternatives, and a decreased linkage to historic and global traditions; no other factor has challenged Skyview Church more than our growth in ethnic diversity over the past four years.[249] Thinking theologically about the potential that diversity presents the local church to embody an ecclesial expression that reflects the character and nature of the One in whose likeness we are made, is needed.

While theology can be understood as a particular field of study (biblical, historical, practical) all theology is contextual as it is impossible to speak of God apart from one's own historical-cultural context.[250] This naivete or ethnocentrism contributed to prejudicial engagement with other cultural groups historically as has been shown. Yet many Christians and communities of faith are tempted to acquiesce to the same temptation of holding their own theological perspectives as the exclusive lens through which to see the world, the church, and its mission. This myopia does not only lay at the heart of ideologies of exclusion but ignores the way in which our faith should always take us beyond self-interest to the care and consideration of those whom society overlooks and excludes (James 1:27). As Skyview Church continues to grow racially diverse, such myopia cannot be permitted as it will only perpetuate ignorance, promote marginalization and lead to the exclusion of diverse perspectives. The answer to becoming an intercultural church arises from the theological perspectives which emerge out of the social/historical context in conversation with the biblical perspectives offered thus far. This is where the primary work of pastors and church communities are to be located: responding to the

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https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001490620&site=ehost-live.

[249] Nieman, "Attending Locally," 198–199.

[250] Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 219.

realities of people's lives in a particular place in authentically Christian ways that maintains the integrity of the biblical witness.

Rethinking Mission: Left Behind & Loving Life

No aspect of theological thought holds greater potential for divisiveness within the Church than eschatology. Eschatology is that part of Christian theology that deals with "end things" and usually includes ideas surrounding resurrection, hell, and eternal life.[251] More pointedly, eschatology is concerned with "where God desires to take creation and what it will take to get there."[252] How we think the story of God ends is significant because it will ultimately determine how we live together as the Church. Simply put, eschatology informs ecclesiology and therefore determines the mission of the church. In addressing a proper approach to eschatology Christopher Wright articulates that the primary aim of God revealed throughout scripture is: "the comprehensive restoration of the sin-corrupted world to its original purpose."[253] In this approach to eschatology, scripture reveals the "unfolding narrative of God's purpose, with creation as the backdrop to all God is doing."[254]

Eschatological perspectives vary across Christian traditions primarily due to the complexity surrounding the interpretation of apocalyptic texts. Apocalyptic texts like that found in the books of Daniel and Revelation contain visions with complex symbolism with varied interpretations and therefore implications for how the church understands the present and views

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[251] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 83.

[252] Eric M. Vail, *Eschatology* (Kansas City: The Foundry Publishing, 2020), 13.

[253] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 51.

[254] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 48.

the future. Sadly, due to its complexity and obscurity, many Christians don't know how to approach eschatological scripture leaving much of the Christian thought on the subject to "heretical aberrations."[255] Poor eschatological perspectives have contributed to the Church's neglect of matters of social justice and creation care.[256] Our thoughts on last things also matters significantly for our shared life together within the church and to our care, and love for the world that God has created.

Lodahl articulates a hope-filled aim to eschatology: "Christian eschatology proclaims that God is able to bring about His purposes for creation – and that He will do so! Every story comes to an end, and the end of God's Story, in terms of both its temporal end and its purposive end, is shalom: 'the healing of nations' (Rev. 22:2)."[257] In his view, the shalom of God over all creation, is promised and will be fulfilled. Consequently, the Church's understanding of God's mission culminates in the restoration and healing of all nations.[258] If the Church locates its self-understanding within the healing mission of God the Church is saying yes to more than just a personal relationship with God through Christ that ensures a safe passage to heaven. The Church is ultimately agreeing to "participation in God's comprehensive redemptive purpose for the world that is cosmic, communal and personal."[259] All of creation, human and non-human, man and beast, land and sea, is now within the scope of God's reconciliatory agenda. This includes the restoration of the divine human relationship and humankind's relationship with others and

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[255] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 143.

[256] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 48.

[257] Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Perspective,* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 210.

[258] Goheen and Wright, *Church and its Vocation,* 23.

[259] Goheen and Wright, *Church and its Vocation,* 48–50.

with natural creation.[260] Lodahl and Wright's perspective challenges "heretical aberrations" such as dispensationalist perspectives that reduce eschatology to predictions and interpretations of present and future events culminating in a cataclysmic end to all God has created and the rapture of God's elect to heaven.[261] A hope-filled view of the end of things derives from the mission of God which culminates in a reconciled world, not one destroyed and abandoned for a better one (Rev. 21:1–5). The implication for the Church is then to not passively wait to be whisked away but to partner with God in his healing agenda. The apostle Paul characterized this healing work as "the ministry of reconciliation," by which all creation is reconciled to God and healed from the corruption and alienation of sin (2 Cor. 5:18). This reconciliatory work is only possible because of what God has already done through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and is empowered by God himself who through Christ gave His Spirit to the Church. The Church is invited to join hands with God and one another to realize such a hope-filled future.

Called to Reconciliation

The Church has already been given a picture of what a restored and healed world will look like through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our eschatological hope has been made visible and tangible through the incarnate Christ. In Jesus we see perfect creation; we see what a restored world will be when heaven meets earth, and we gain a vision of the ultimate union between God and man that will be fully realized upon Christ's return. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's mission and the foretaste of a reconciled creation. Our eschatological

[260] Goheen and Wright, *Church and its Vocation,* 48–50.

[261] Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*. (Grand Rapid: Baker Academic, 1998), 211.

understanding of scripture then does not derive from a dispensationalist interpretation but is revealed in and through the person and ministry of Christ as the renewal of fallen creation to its intended purpose. God has shown us what the anticipated end looks like and it looks like Jesus and the kingdom of Heaven he brought to earth. Through Jesus the bridge of reconciliation has been put in place enabling reconciliation with God, man and creation. Lodahl relates the significance of Jesus' earthly life and ministry to what we can expect upon his return: "If 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever' (Heb. 13:8), then the Second-coming One will not, indeed cannot, be essentially unlike the One who has already come."[262] We then as followers of Christ, as the Church of Christ, learn to live well into God's anticipated future by following the perfect example of Jesus in the present. This is what it means to live life in the kingdom of God; life lived between "the already and the not yet."[263] Works of compassion, justice, evangelism, and service are all held together as signs of the kingdom that is already among us and the kingdom that will one day be fully realized upon Christ's return. Waiting for God's intended future is then not about escape from the world and its problems but learning to live as participants with God in his reconciling mission by imitating the example of Jesus in our daily lives.

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[262] Lodahl, *The Story,* 211.

[263] Thomas Noble, "Advent: Already, But Not Yet." *Holiness Today*, November 9, 2022. https://holinesstoday.org/index.php/imported-news/advent-already-not-yet-0.

Good Creation

Historically the Church has not viewed the end in this hope-filled and reconciling way. Poor eschatological perspectives ultimately betray a theology of a good creation worth saving.[264] Poor perspectives of eschatology fail to discern that what God has made is repeatedly affirmed as good in the Bible (1 Tim. 4:4-5). Wright explains that beginning with the fall of creation in Genesis three as opposed to the good creation made in the image of God in Genesis one is to not grasp the end that God has in sight: "a Bible stripped of its beginning and end will produce a distorted view of mission."[265] One such distortion is that God's only purpose is to save people from sin and judgment to the exclusion of the cosmic reconciliation that is provocatively envisioned in John's Revelation:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also, he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Rev. 21:1–5)."[266]

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[264] Grenz, *Created for Community,* 259.

[265] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 48.

[266] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 48.

As scripture begins with a God who creates something good (Gen. 1:1) and ends with a God who remains committed to rescuing the good he has made (Rev. 21:1), God's view of his creation is that it is worth saving because what he has made has immense value.[267] Yes, sin distorts the good God has made in Genesis three and disrupts God's creation leading to the separation of humanity from God and each other; but it is not where the story begins or ends. Indigenous perspectives of creation care reveal this deep understanding of the inherent goodness throughout God's creation.[268] This is a concept which is too often lost within perspectives of salvation that reduce God's purpose to helping humanity escape judgment for sin.[269] Failure to see God's creation as good also distorts our view of the other, for in all that God has made including humankind, the goodness of God resides in every culture, race and people.

If, European Christians arriving on the shores of Canada, discerned the goodness of God in the Indigenous land and its people, how different the story may have turned out to be. If the local church approach racially and culturally diverse peoples with a theology of a good creation in mind, it may enable an engagement with others that is marked by dignity and mutual respect that facilitates reconciliation and peace. The perspectives gleaned from the historical approaches to diverse others reveal the exclusive view that 'good' resided only within certain persons and cultures. This perspective led to the disregard of Indigenous cultures, the justification of slavery, assimilation, and subjugation of people and their lands. Today, racialized minorities entering predominantly Euro-Canadian congregations may not be treated harshly, but their cultures and

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[267] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 48.

[268] Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You*, (Bloomington Minnesota: Chosen Books, 2000), 95–97.

[269] Twiss, *One Church,* 96.

associated perspectives continue to be delegitimized as 'less good' compared to the European cultural norm. The idea that God is intent on redeeming all that He has made must include the diversity of all humankind made in his image. Perspectives that view the end as punishment and escape instead of reconciliation and restoration of a sin corrupted creation, fail to grasp that reconciliation bears witness to a good creation worth saving, not a creation irreparable and doomed to destruction.

No Exclusion!

A final consideration regarding the mission of the church is important as we rethink engagement with diverse others. Wright points out that the mission of the Church is to carry forward that which God began in the Old Testament with the calling of Abraham and Israel in Genesis 18: 17–19:

> "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."[270]

Recent antisemitic rhetoric from a well-known celebrity reminds us that as Christians we are called to see ourselves as a part of a larger story, a larger family of faith, than we may choose or desire.[271] The mission of the Christian Church however stands in continuity with the mission God gave to Abraham and Israel. Like Israel, the Church is called to be a community who live by

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[270] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 82.

[271] Kanye West's Antisemitic Troubling Behavior, Here's Everything He's Said In Recent Weeks, *Forbes* accessed November 6, 2022: https://www.forbes.com/sites/marisadellatto/2022/12/02/kanye-wests-anti-semitic-troubling-behavior-heres-everything-hes-said-in-recent-weeks/?sh=37a512176de3.

the "ethical standards of the ways of God, so that God can fulfill his promise to Abraham and bring about the blessing of the nations."[272] Those who are in Christ, are heirs of Abraham and therefore heirs to the promises God made to him and the responsibility God laid on him.[273] Simply put, if the Church inherited the blessing placed upon Abraham the Church has inherited his mission also. Replacement theology contends that the new covenant in Christ has replaced the old Mosaic covenant.[274] The outworking of this heretical perspective is that the Church has essentially replaced Israel in God's plan of reconciliation. This type of thinking has led to the historical marginalization of Jews in Western society and was horrifically typified in Hitler's "Final Solution" to eradicate the Jewish people.[275] The idea that Israel is replaceable is damaging to our understanding of the character of the God of the Bible. If God chose to replace Israel, what he promised to do through Abraham is unfulfilled, making God unfaithful to his covenant promise and not worthy of our trust. The continuity of the Christian Church with Israel's calling is therefore essential to discerning that God has not abandoned his covenant commitment to Israel and that Jewish people matter within the divine reconciliatory mission. While replacement theology focuses particularly on Israel's replacement by the Church, similar perspectives have been generated in relation to people from different faiths, cultures, and ethnicities. The idea that any group is counted outside the scope of God's reconciling mission, inadvertently makes God a liar and the other the object of exclusion.

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[272] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 83.

[273] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 83.

[274] William Varner, "Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 335, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001574088&site=ehost-live.

[275] Henry A. Munson, "Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust," *Religions* 9 no. 1 (January 2018): 2-3, http://doi:10.3390/rel9010026.

The Thread that Binds!

Jesus is the thread that connects the Church to Israel. This thread was however difficult to understand, especially if you were a Jew living at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Many were confused by the way in which Jesus chose to bring about the kingdom of God, even those close to him. Like his own disciples, John the Baptist wrestled with who Jesus was when instead of overthrowing Rome and reinstating Israel as the sovereign heirs of God, Jesus extended healing, resurrected the dead, and proclaimed good news to the poor and the outsider (Matt. 11:1–6). The restorative healing activity of Jesus confuses John the Baptist to the point where he asks: "Are you still the one we are waiting for or are we waiting on someone else?" (Matt. 11:3). Jewish messianic expectations did not align with Jesus' inclusive healing agenda, yet it is the healing of all nations and all of creation that Jesus reveals and pursues all the way to the cross. Like John the Baptist, the Church have at times sought a different Jesus than the one scripture reveals He is. Yet Jesus understood his role as one of fulfilling what God set out to do through His people Israel from the beginning. He came to bring good news and to accomplish on Israel's behalf what they were destined to do: "to be a light unto the nations." Significantly, God made his healing purposes for all of creation known through the ministry of Jesus. Through his life, death, and resurrection He offers hope to all people, not just Israel. The ministry of reconciliation we see in Jesus as healer, teacher, and servant gives us a picture of the work the church is called to participate in as we await his return. Lodahl's articulation of eschatology along with Wright's corrective does not only challenges perspectives that subvert God's intention for reconciliation but elevates the accountability we have as the Church of Christ to care for our world and to work toward reconciled relationship with all people. The hope-filled reconciliatory plan of God was

embodied in the person of Christ who becomes not only our Savior, but the One who shows us how to live redemptively as we await his return.

The intercultural church will likewise understand that it is called to the "ministry of reconciliation," and that such work is holistic in scope and not exclusive of any people for all are made in the image of God. Replacement theology and perspectives that seek exclusion of any people regardless of race or status contradict the character and promise of God. The intercultural church will work intentionally to safeguard against this perspective for the way in which it perpetuates exclusion of the other. Discipleship shaped by a hope-filled end sees racial reconciliation as an essential aspect of the calling of the church. The church cannot overlook the need to embody practices that enable reconciliation to take place between people, God, and the created world in which we live. This means that the intercultural church's mission will include acts of evangelism, advocacy, social justice, as well as creation care.

Reclaiming our Christian Identity

If how we see God determines how we see others, our theological understanding of who God is matters significantly within the life of the church. The historical review shows that those created in the image of God often failed to recognize the divine image in others. Where segregation was not an option assimilation into a cultural other was enforced. The biblical reflection on the Jerusalem Church's insistence that Gentiles become Jews in order to belong to the new community of faith reveals a God "made in the image of the Jew." Gentiles could only become a part of the new people of God if they first converted to Judaism through circumcision and Torah observance (Acts 15:1). Since the first church council in Jerusalem the role has been reversed and Jewish people continue to be excluded from the Christian Church on account of

their Jewish heritage.[276] Yet, the New Testament reveals Jesus Christ was a devout Jew, a descendent of one of Israel's greatest rulers, King David, and who remained a Jew throughout his ministry. In Jesus we see an image of God that is particular to a people, the Messiah that comes to reconcile all, comes to us as an ethnic Jew. His Jewish identity proved a challenge for some adherents to the Christian faith over the centuries. Jesus has been rendered in paintings and sculptures as a White male with a fair complexion, light eyes, and blonde hair.[277] More recently Jesus has been depicted in many indigenous cultures to reflect the unique ethnicities of these cultures. Such depictions repeat the human tendency to make Jesus like us, dismissing the particularity of his Jewish ethnicity and identity. While the Bible affirms that God took the form of human likeness in Jesus, he took the particular form of a Jewish male in first-century Galilee (Phil. 2:7).

The particularity of Jesus' cultural identity as a Jewish Messiah is significant to how we ought to live in relation to ethnic and racial others. Jesus did not dress like a Gentile or assume their language or customs but remained true to his Jewish culture without allowing such particularity to keep him from seeing the good in them or from God's reconciling purpose for their lives (John 8:1–11). As a Jew Jesus fulfilled that which God promised would happen through the Jews, through Israel. He became "the light unto the nations (John 8:12), the fulfillment of Torah (Matt. 5:17), the bread of life (John 8:35), the living water (John 7:37–39), and the sacrificial lamb (John 1:29). Stated more provocatively, his Jewish identity was a part of

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[276] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 52.

[277] Melissa De Witte, "Who people believe rules in heaven influences their beliefs about who rules on Earth, Stanford scholars find," *Stanford News*, January 21, 2020, https://news.stanford.edu/2020/01/31/consequences-perceiving-god-white-man/.

the fulfillment of God's promise to do through Abraham and his offspring that which he covenanted he would do when he first called Abram (Gen.12:3). Significantly, as Jesus remained true to his ethnic heritage, he did not hold his Jewish ethnicity or culture as the exclusive authority over others. His engagement with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1–42, reveals the ethnic tension and socially prescribed distance existent between a Gentile woman and Jewish man. Yet, this encounter reveals how Jesus engages the Samaritan woman with dignity and respect as one created in the image of God with the capacity to respond to God's invitation: "A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink" (John 4:7). Alternatively, Jesus would not deny his Jewish culture as he converses with the Samaritan woman nor would he insist on her becoming a Jew to receive his free offer of "living water" (vs. 13–14).[278] This encounter with the Samaritan woman reveals that her culture and status as a Gentile and as a woman was not a hindrance to Jesus as a Jewish male who following their conversation stays with the Samaritans for two days defying social norms (John 4:40–42).

Identity and Belonging

As a South African man of color, I grew up in a world shaped by the distorted view that the European male was the perfect human and that all other races were inferior. This perspective created deep insecurity within me as a child that persisted throughout my adolescence. As I could not change the color of my skin to become what society held up as the ideal man, I was destined to a second-class existence. It has taken much of my adult life to find liberation and healing from such a distorted self-image. Today I realize that the evil within an Apartheid society was not just

[278] Kapolyo, "Matthew," 1259.

that white supremacy rendered all other races inferior, it is that the racialized people of South Africa believed it. On his own journey toward freedom from racial and cultural inferiority Cameroonian theologian Jean-Marc Ela said: "Nothing was obliging me to stand before God wearing a borrowed humanity."[279] Just as Jesus came into our world as a Jewish male and fulfilled the will of God, so can all people in their own skin, culture, and tongue.

Jesus was comfortable in his own skin, but many immigrants are not made to feel comfortable within predominantly white churches. Conformity is expected and often comes at the risk, as Gonzalez points out, of denying people the opportunity to be who God has created them to be.[280] Denying one's culture, language and history can lead to the assumption of identities that are borrowed and not authentically our own and is detrimental to our view of self and others. Accepting who we are is an essential first step toward readiness for intercultural community. Denise Ackermann advances the idea that the formation of one's identity ought to be a process of belonging and distancing so that we may first truly know ourselves and so doing ready ourselves to know the other.[281] In her book, "After the Locust," she conveys her theological perspectives on identity, difference, and faith in the form of a letter addressed to her granddaughters.[282] The content of the letter reveal the tensions within the home of her upbringing and the racial struggles within the broader segregated South African culture of her formative years. Reflecting upon her past and the influence it has had upon her own life and perspectives,

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[279] Sunberg, Carla D. and Daniel Gomis, *Color: God's Intention for Diversity* (Kansas City: The Foundry, 2021), 23.

[280] González, *Beyond Welcome*, 9.

[281] Denise M. Ackermann, *After the Locust: Letters from a Landscape of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2003), 12.

[282] Ackermann, *After the Locust*, 1–22.

she warns against the temptation to take on one's cultural and familial identity uncritically. Doing so, she cautions, risks making our life and experience the central narrative through which the world and all others are to be understood, measured, and judged.[283] An honest and intentional engagement with our past, our history, and where we stem from are essential to forming a healthy sense of who we are. This she defines as the process of belonging. Ackermann also cautions against the danger of abandoning one's culture and family entirely: "denying my roots and my culture may lead to establishing a false identity because I cannot live without one."[284] Distance, as a second movement, is required to see the world beyond that which has defined us, but such distance can only be effectively navigated when a person has a critical awareness of their own place of belonging.

Unity not Uniformity

If Skyview is going to become a church that welcomes all people and who together learn how to fulfill God's reconciling purposes for our world, the example of Jesus' particularity is instructive. Jesus reveals that distinctive cultures can become a means to fulfilling God's reconciliatory agenda. The assumption among some within the church is that in order for Skyview to become an intercultural church we must all become less particular and more undifferentiated. People often confuse the call to intercultural inclusivity as a call to uniformity. Uniformity makes us less who God created us to be in an effort to conform to an ideal that does not reflect our true selves and thus betrays the value of diversity within a church seeking to be

[283] Ackermann, *After the Locust,* 14.

[284] Ackermann, *After the Locust*, 12.

inclusive. More importantly, uniformity keeps us from embracing who we are as people and leads to a lack of self-knowing and self-love. Uniformity also deprives the church from the potential to enrich our understanding of God and therefore to embody diversity in unity that bears witness to the character and nature of the Triune God. We can and must learn from cultures unlike ourselves if we are to live well as a diverse church.

Becoming Learners

It is often assumed, that immigrants are the ones who rely upon the gifts from the dominant culture, but this is not always true. Immigrants come bearing valuable gifts for the Church in Canada today. We can learn from cultures unlike ourselves that in some ways more naturally reflect the biblical perspective for Christian community. A particular example arises from the cultural difference sociologist have noted between collectivist (non-western) and individualistic (Western) cultures.[285] Collectivist cultures consider the significance of the community or family in decision making whereas in individualistic cultures the rights and privileges of the individual often takes precedence.[286] The African concept of 'Ubuntu' offers an alternative approach to the Western perspective of how we see ourselves and how we perceive of others in community.[287] As a concept for reordering life together, the term gained prominence following the demise of Apartheid and was popularized by the late Archbishop of the Anglican

[285] Sarah A. Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot and Cold Climate Cultures*, (Hagerstown, Maryland: McDougal Publishing, 2000), 41–43.

[286] Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar*, 41–43.

[287] Jaco S. Dreyer, "Ubuntu: A Practical Theological Perspective," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19 no. 1 (2015): 192, https://doi:10.1515/ijpt-2015-0022.

Church of South Africa, Desmond Tutu.[288] Tutu, considered an icon for reconciliation, stressed the significance of Ubuntu for healing and restoration from the wounds of racism. He defines the term as follows:

"Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks to the very essence of being human. When you want to give high praise to someone we say, "Yu, u nobuntu;" he or she has ubuntu. This means that they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring, and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, "a person is a person through other people" (….) I am human because I belong, I participate, I share. A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are."[289]

Given the etymology of the word which derives from the Nguni language, Ubuntu has most often been translated into English as 'personhood' or 'humanness.'[290] Though this definition grasps some of what is meant by the term, it does not capture its relational and communal qualities as expressed in the phrase: "a person is a person through other people."[291] Ubuntu offers a view of identity that is formulated within a social context and is governed by mutuality, affirmation of the other, availability to the other, and respect for the other. More

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[288] Dreyer, "Ubuntu," 193.

[289] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider Publishing, 1999), 34–35.

[290] Dreyer, "Ubuntu," 191.

[291] Tutu, *No Future*, 34.

significantly, Ubuntu offers a view of the individual that is defined within a community in which the other is an essential part of my wellbeing.[292] In the Ubuntu ethic, we are all impacted negatively by the marginalization or discrimination of one. Differences in this perspective are not considered a threat, but gifts through which the community is strengthened and defined.[293]A primary criticism of Ubuntu is that the emphasis upon communal consensus has the potential to demand oppressive conformity and loyalty to the group; but in essence this ethic challenges the rugged individualism of the Western Church by valuing community as essential to becoming a people who live not for the self, but for the wellbeing of all.[294] What keeps us from unity within the local church will always require discernment but in Jesus we see an example of the reconciling mission of God that is not hindered by diversity but expressed through the particularity of his Jewish culture. More is offered than respecting the unique cultures of others, we can and must also learn from the unique insights and cultural gifts others bring. When we become comfortable in our own skin, we can better appreciate the unique cultures of others, learning to love the skin we've been birthed in is essential to our ability to be loved and to love others well in a diverse church.

Love at the Core

The Apostles Creed, recited often within the corporate worship of the local church confesses our belief in the doctrine of the Trinity: "we believe in God the Father, God the Son,

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[292] Douglas F. P. Taylor, "Defining Ubuntu for Business Ethics: A Deontological Approach." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 33 (2014): 331, DOI:10.1080/02580136.2014.948328.

[293] Tutu, *No Future*, 35.

[294] Dreyer, "Ubuntu," 197.

and God the Holy Spirit.[295]Grentz clarifies that what we are essentially confessing is that: "God is one, God is three, God is diversity, and God is unity."[296] While the word "Trinity" is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible it is implicit within the Old and New Testament and was formulated after the New Testament was written through a lengthy process of theological reflection that arose out of the experience of the early Christians (see Gen. 1:25; 3:22; Matt. 28:19; John 1:14; 2 Cor. 3:14).[297] Significantly, through the doctrine of the Trinity we are able to fully apprehend the character and nature of God through the interrelatedness within the godhead.[298] The primary characteristic that marks the trinitarian relationship is love. In Matthew's Gospel this is made evident when at Jesus' baptism the Spirit descends upon the Son and the Father declares Jesus the Beloved Son in whom God delights: "And a voice from the heavens said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Christian baptism roots our identity in divine love as we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. Through our baptism we are essentially brought under the divine authority to reflect the very love that characterizes the triune God. What is clear from scripture is that Jesus intends for his disciples to reflect this love and insists that in the absence of such love, one cannot truly claim to know God: "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). But such love has a particular character, defined not by emotion, sentiment or feeling, but rooted in self-giving.[299] Grentz notes: "Active self-giving love builds the unity

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[295] The Apostles' Creed is a summary of what the Church teaches, and of what Christians universally believe. Saying the Creed binds Christians together as a believing community, across different traditions and practices.

[296] Grenz, *Created for Community*, 44–45.

[297] Grenz, *Created for Community*, 42.

[298] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 210.

[299] Grenz, *Created for Community*, 47.

within the one God. The unity of God is nothing less than each of the trinitarian persons giving himself to the others."[300] Grentz helps us to understand that the nature of the love present within the godhead is one of self-giving through which each of the members of the trinity is united in a self-giving love for the purpose of reconciling all of creation.[301] We thus understand love through the actions of God the Father as sender of the Son and the Spirit, the Son as sender of the Spirit and the Apostles, and the Spirit as sender of Jesus and the Apostles.[302] As those created in the image of the triune God and restored to his loving image through our baptism we therefore share in this sending mission of love and are united to others who share in this self giving work. Our literature review has shown Christian missionary endeavors were often done in non-self-giving ways that betrayed the very character of the trinitarian God in whose image we are made.[303] The nature of God's missionary activity in the world is characterized by a non-coercive love rooted in the divine impulse to rescue and not condemn: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16–17). The reason for the incarnation (John 3:16) and the giving of the Spirit (Rom. 8:15–17) is divine love for creation revealed through the comprehensive reconciling mission that God initiated since the calling of Abraham and as fulfilled through Jesus Christ who prayed: "Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved

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[300] Grenz, *Created for Community*, 47.

[301] Grenz, *Created for Community*, 45.

[302] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 210–211.

[303] As in the case where British Missionaries developed the 'Slave Bible' to teach African slaves to read but not to find any scriptural support to seek liberation from slavery.

me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).[304] Critical to our understanding of engagement with diverse others within the church is that at the heart of such interaction is a Christian identity defined by the impulse to love in self-giving ways; that is, the willingness to give ourselves in loving service to the other. This kind of love requires the willingness to lay down power so that we may love in non-coercive ways.

Embracing Servanthood

The love of God finds its perfect expression in the self-giving love of Jesus Christ who gave up divine power and privilege to become like us (Phil. 2:1–11). Nouwen, McNeill and Morrison, name this self-giving incarnational example of Jesus, "voluntary displacement."[305] God through the life of Christ, as an act of divine love, gives his life away willingly by laying down his divine power and by assuming the posture of a servant to show all the way to God. Such an expression of love is an intentional action of entering into the suffering of others as an act of fellowship and solidarity.[306] This way of life holds little appeal as it requires: "entering places of challenge and even suffering to truly become a people of compassion."[307] Yet, Jesus is the divine example for the Church and his voluntary displacement is an authentically Christian response to the alienation, separation, and loneliness that defines our world.[308] In Philippians 2 we see precisely what such self-giving love looks like and what it demanded of Jesus Christ:

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[305] Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, and Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 60–61.

[306] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 3–4.

[307] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 4.

[308] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 4.

"Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:4–8)."

While the question of 'what precisely Jesus gave up when he became like us' is important and the source of much scholarly interest, it is the kind of person that Jesus became that the scripture makes clear and that proves significant to how we ought to love others. According to Philippians, Jesus did not only become like us, but he became a particular kind of us; one the scripture describes as a "slave" (NRSVUE), a "servant" (NIV). Jesus became a servant, not a master, a slave, not a slave owner, to show us the posture that enables us to love as God has loved us. That posture is one of humility, beautifully and powerfully demonstrated through Jesus when He assumed the place of a servant amongst his disciples when he washed their feet:

"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him" (John 13:3–5).

The incarnation of Jesus Christ then becomes for us an example of how to enter into relationship with others in ways that joins us to them in love. The practice of self-giving love through the posture of servanthood requires that we lay down our status and power over others so

that we may serve them out of the humble posture of sacrificial love.[309] Throughout his life Jesus gave himself away to others and though he could have used his power as the divine Son he willingly gave his life away for the redemption of others. His self-giving love constantly moved him toward those others would have excluded. But instead of excluding the other, Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners (Matt.9:10–16), allowed the unclean to touch his body (Luke 7:36–50) and his clothing (Mark 5:21–34) and healed the leper through physical touch (Matt.8:1–4). Significant here is how the posture of servanthood enables relatedness at the point of human need that the posture of human power or status restricts.

Servants got their hands dirty and so did Jesus. He touched and healed the contagious leper, (Matt. 8:3) and He placed his hands on the blind man to restore his sight (John 9:6–7). The nature of servanthood as seen through the example of Jesus challenges perspectives of holiness that is defined by not touching the unclean for fear of contamination. Holiness was to be the defining characteristic of Israel and the New Testament Church: "as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct, for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15–16). Such holiness is expressed in the Old Testament through the separation and avoidance of contact with things and people deemed unclean in order to maintain Israel's covenantal relationship with God. Yet, Jesus as God incarnate, demonstrates holiness by touching the broken and the unclean and by making them whole. In the servant Jesus, holiness is not defined by what we keep ourselves from, but by divine love that gives itself away in service to the other for their healing.

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[309] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 61.

The Church's engagement with the indigenous people of Canada was characterized by abusive power rooted in cultural superiority that was contrary to the example of Christ. Political power and cultural superiority insisted upon assimilation with no sharing in the experience of those whom the colonial Christian imagination viewed as pagan, ungodly, and uncivilized. The posture of colonial Christianity was not self-giving love but forced adherence to human authority and power. Those who desire to follow in the way of Jesus within a diverse church must similarly discern how power keeps them from solidarity with others and be willing to lay down power by assuming the posture of servants in order to reflect the compassion and love of Christ. It is only from the posture of servanthood that we can discern our own poverty and need for grace. If the local church is to engage in a ministry of reconciliation, such compassion is needed so that we may be able to realize the potential for authentic community that is dependent on God and not our own strength, status, or power.[310]

Overcoming Fear

Justice, offers Law, is enabled within the church when power is shared equally with others and not held over the other in abusive or controlling ways.[311] Servanthood is the intentional movement away from the "world that wants to make us objects of interest" while simultaneously eliciting a new awareness and equality with others in that space. We therefore enable solidarity and just relationships when we learn to lay down power in service of the

[310] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 63.

[311] Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1993), 35.

other.[312] In the context of Skyview Church, the impulse of the dominant culture is not one of relinquishing power or control. As this power impulse persists, justice remains unattainable. The example of continuing the "Trunk or Treat" ministry at the Skyview Church by the Euro-Canadian majority church board makes clear that control and power within the dominant cultural frame usurps the opportunity for empathy and solidarity with immigrants. This unwillingness to relinquish the right to have things our way keeps people within the dominant cultural frame from empathy and understanding for the immigrant and the immigrant from true fellowship and solidarity with others. Law maintains that what hinders justice within the multicultural church setting is fear; resistance to surrendering power is rooted in fear.[313] We fear what may happen to us and our churches when we give up control. Gavin de Becker, author of the book "the Gift of Fear," says: "The very fact that you fear something is solid evidence that it is not happening. Fear summons powerful predictive resources that tell us what might come next. It is that which might come next that we fear—what might happen, not what is happening."[314] This fear of what may happen when we relinquish power and control is fueled by voices outside and within the church. Fear-inspiring rhetoric surrounding immigrants, and undocumented workers, and fears associated with movements in support of racial justice and equality, cause the church to retract from engagement with the work of reconciliation it is called to do. Fear often triumphs over scriptural authority and even when Christians know what the Bible demands, shy away from the courageous work to which they have been called.

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[312] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion*, 65.

[313] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell*, 13–14.

[314] Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protect Us from Violence* (New York: Dell. 1999), 82.

A study, of forty evangelical Christians, four evangelical pastors, and an evangelical outreach organization that work with Muslim people in the United States reveals how fear influenced their engagement and attitude toward Muslims.[315] The study revealed that despite participant interest and organizational mandates to positively engage in dialogue regarding the Christian faith, the perspective of the majority of the participants toward Muslim people remained considerably negative.[316] The study concluded that participants were often inhospitable to Muslim people despite their Christian faith and evangelistic interest because of the fear associated with Islam and Muslim people in general.[317] If fear wins, the intercultural church will not be realized because trust is essential to forming and sustaining relationships.

As I embarked on the journey toward writing this dissertation and announced it to our congregation several congregants inquired as to the subject of my dissertation. When I explained that my interest was to develop a theological perspective to help us become an intercultural church, a common response was to question why this was necessary. In one conversation, a White male congregant in his mid-thirties commented: "I would not go to your country of birth and attend a church service there expecting that you change how you worship and do church to make me feel comfortable; why do you think we should do so at Skyview?"[318] This comment and accompanying question reveal in part the challenge and the perspective that some hold within the church: "Why should we change for others when we would not expect them to change

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[315] A.A. Bhatia, "American Evangelicals and Islam: Their Perspectives, Attitudes and Practices Towards Muslims in the US," *Transformation* 34 (2017), 26–37, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0265378816631251

[316] Bhatia, "American Evangelicals," 36–37.

[317] Bhatia, "American Evangelicals," 36.

[318] Anonymous congregant, conversation with author, June 19th, 2022.

for us?" Such a perspective is rather naïve when held in the context of colonial Christian expansion when European Christians violated the unique cultures of others and enforced their own cultural frame on Indigenous peoples in Canada and other parts of the world. But, more importantly, such a comment reveals the erroneous perspective that becoming an intercultural church is simply about making room for the other by acquiescing to their cultural preferences and needs. It has been the growing thesis within this paper that diversity of race and culture is not simply about hospitality, but that diversity of people and culture is a needed configuration for the local church to help us grow into a people who incarnates the reconciling power of Christ across and through our unique differences. What is true about the congregant's comment is that this will require sacrifice, but such sacrifice is not done to simply replace one cultural norm with another, it is sacrifice made in the hope that God will raise up something new and needed within the church for the sake of his reconciling mission to the world.

In "Exclusion and Embrace, a theological treatise on identity and otherness," Volf writes to make sense of the civil war and ethnic cleansing that took place in the former Yugoslavia.[319] In his response to the problem of difference that pitted neighbor against neighbor, Volf points out that "identity is not simply what we are not, but it is the total of what is distinct about me and what binds me to another person."[320] For Volf, identity boundaries are important as they give us the needed framework within which to understand our distinct cultural and historical selves, but

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[319] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Treatise of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 22–28.

[320] Miroslav Volf and Thomas Neufeld, "Conversations with Miroslav Volf on his book Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 18 (2000), 73, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001337400&site=ehost-live.

he also sees in these identity markers an inherent danger. When these markers become our primary means of distinguishing ourselves from others, we tend to exclude, discriminate, and do harm to those unlike us. A simple articulation of Volf's argument is to see that whatever identity marker we place before our baptismal identity as Christ followers will ultimately define the type of Christians we will be. We are therefore not Canadian Christians because our Christian identity ought to be the primary lens for self-understanding and our identity as Canadian secondary. We are Christians who happen to be Canadian; in this sense our primary identity shapes what it then means to be Canadian, male, female, an architect, nurse, doctor and so on. When Christian nationalism conflates itself with Christianity, political agendas often triumph over Christian principles and Christianity essentially becomes a servant to the political interest and power. To combat this, Volf advances a view of identity that is redefined by the centrality of the cross of Christ. When the cross of Christ primarily defines who we are and not the flag of our country, our national, racial, and cultural identity boundaries "can become porous, allowing traffic to go back and forth between the self and multiple others."[321] Though our race, nationality and language are important these markers have historically been used to betray a central claim of scripture, that all humanity have sinned and stand in need of God's grace (Rom. 3:23-24). As Christians, racial and cultural difference ought not lead us to attitudes of superiority or acts of exclusion but to the posture of repentance and embrace. Through our Christian confession the cross of Christ invites us to see ourselves as equals in our shortcomings and invites a humility necessary for the formation of a new community of people primarily defined by their shared need of grace. Those who in faith embrace the Lordship of Jesus Christ have then 'been crucified

[321] Volf and Neufeld, "Conversations with Miroslav Volf," 73.

with Christ' and are able to live as members of a new community constituent of diverse people and cultures in which racial superiority is antithetical to the practice of faith in relationship with others.

The Liminal Power of the Cross

The cross of Christ evens the playing field because it reveals that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). It is the place where all people irrespective of race meet God not as privileged or powerful, but as those who stand before the Creator of this world in need of mercy and grace. The cross in this sense is a liminal space, where past ways of thinking and being come to an end and the potential for new thoughts and community arises. From a sociological perspective, liminality is a threshold experience, a paradoxical state that requires both the death of what was to enable the resurrection of new ways of being.[322] It is a space that requires separation from the group within which the person's identity was initially formed to become open to a renewed understanding and relation to others. Despite the potential for the liminal stage to be threatening, it carries the promise of transformation into a new configuration of people that was previously inaccessible. As all are equal in their fallen state, the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross is offered to all as a means of forgiveness and reconciliation. All come to Christ as those in need of forgiveness and mercy as he alone is worthy in the sight of God. No one is less or more in need of grace, for all have fallen short. It is the cross of Christ that enables the forgiveness for our sins but also enables us to embrace the other as equals and to

[322] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 5.

be reconciled to them as brothers and sisters in Christ. The cross is not only a paradigm for personal liberation but, a liminal place for the reformation into a new people, the people of God.

The cross of Christ levels the playing field because by it we confess that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The cross as a liminal space does away with power that controls others and invites us to lay down power for the sake of communion with God and others. This does not mean that at the foot of the cross our diversity ends. We are not saved from racial or cultural particularity; we are saved from the proclivity toward superiority, entitlement, comparison and control. The cross of Christ as a liminal space brings us before God on equal footing and makes possible a new life with God and others. Ultimately, the life that is made possible through the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, requires practices to help us live faithfully over the sin of alienation and exclusion. It is to these practices we now attend, to articulate an intercultural ministry framework within the life of Skyview Church.

CHAPTER 4: THE INTERCULTURAL MINISTRY FRAMEWORK

Ackermann articulates that what the Church needs is an ethic of relatedness that helps us to learn "how we can live respectfully, lovingly and creatively across our differences, in communion with one another."[323] It is to this ethic of relatedness we now attend as we consider the potential that diversity of race and culture holds for an intercultural expression of the local church. There is no standard model for becoming intercultural and so the proposed framework offered is particular to the current life and ministry context of the Skyview Church. Before we consider the intercultural framework, racial, and cultural diversity within the congregation has been presented as a contextual and biblically relevant articulation for the practice of the Christian faith. Christian engagement with diverse others historically along with contemporary fears and perspectives associated with racial diversity within Western society in particular challenges the realization of such an intercultural church. Representation of diverse people within the local congregation is not enough to incarnate an intercultural framework for ministry but is an essential starting point to the formation of a congregation who views diversity as an asset to Christian formation and mission. Consequently, the task is significant and the process to becoming an intercultural church fraught with challenge and the potential for conflict, an inevitable part of change. James Christenson reminds us that: "the purpose of Christianity is not to avoid difficulty, but to produce a character adequate enough to meet it when it comes. It does not make life easy; rather it tries to make us great enough for life."[324] It is this character

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[323] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 6.

[324] Tracey M. Lewis-Giggetts, *The Integrated Church: Authentic Multicultural Ministry* (Kansas City: Beacon Hills Press, 2011, 42.

formation that is in mind as we now consider an intercultural approach to ministry within the local church.

VALUES, RATIONALE, POSTURES AND PRACTICES

The framework offered below can be viewed as a formative process that will require patience, ongoing discernment, a committed core group of people, and above all prayer. To that end, eight values are introduced as key to the formation and sustaining of an intercultural church derived from the analysis presented thus far. These values are:

1. Prayer As Subversive Action
2. Cultivating Cross-Cultural Friendship
3. Empowering Catalyst for Change
4. Learning Together
5. Reclaiming Cultural Practices
6. Table Fellowship
7. Learning to Speak in Many Tongues
8. Liminal Formation

While a church may hold that they value cross-cultural engagement, it remains an aspiration if the allocation of time and resources do not reflect that value. Malphurs alerts us to discern between aspirational and actual values.[325] Aspirational values are those things organizations attempt to articulate are important but are not a reflection of where time and resources are invested. Alternatively, actual values emerge from what we are already doing and what we presently invest our time and resources toward. Until intercultural values, as presented

[325] Aubrey Malphurs, *Values Driven Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 29.

hereafter, become practices within the ministry of the local church, can we discern a church that is being interculturally formed. Consequently, some of the values listed in what follows are aspirational while some are actual within the ministry of Skyview Church. Where necessary, the difference will be noted, and appropriate examples listed. Each of the eight values articulated will be presented in terms of the rationale for that value, postures that enable such a value to be received within the individual and the congregation, and practices that enable that value to shape the communal life of the congregation.

The rationale for the respective value intends to show why the value is needed and what it intends to accomplish as it relates to the formation of an intercultural church. The postures refer to the attitudes and thoughts conducive to articulating that value within the congregation. These postures will enable the value to be expressed and practiced within the congregation. The practices will include corporate and individual disciplines that can be implemented as expressions of the value. While some practices presented hereafter may already be implemented within the life of the Skyview Church, the overall process as outlined offers an overarching approach to the formation of an intercultural church as a model for local church ministry.

VALUE 1: PRAYER AS SUBVERSIVE ACTION

> "Prayer is subversive activity. It involves a more or less act of defiance against any claim by the current regime. . . slowly but surely, not culture, not family, not government, not job, not even the tyrannous self can stand against the quiet power and creative influence of God's sovereignty. Every natural tie of family and race, every willed commitment to person and nation is finally subordinated to the rule of God."[326]

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[326] Eugene Peterson, *Where Your Treasure Is: Psalms that Summon You from Self to Community* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 10.

Rationale: Prayer Enables us to Overcome Barriers to Intercultural Ministry

The challenge that diversity of race and culture presents to the local church are significant. Jews who became followers of Jesus in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15) insisted on Gentiles first becoming Jewish in order to belong. Following the first century, Gentiles demanded Jews forsake Judaism in order to find acceptance within the early church.[327] Historical and contemporary Christian engagement with diverse and racialized cultures present a significant hurdle to any church desiring to incarnate diversity of race and culture well. Congregational studies show that "attracting and retaining a mixture of different races" within a congregation is not only difficult but often fail due to the strong attraction most people have toward sameness.[328] The "homophily principle," which posits that people prefer association with those who are most like themselves, impedes multicultural expressions of the church as diversity creates discomfort and challenge to existing ways of thinking and acting.[329] The majority of congregational studies have also shown that multicultural churches lag in numeric growth when compared to homogenous churches given the complexity and challenges implicit within the diverse church context.[330] Ministering to one demographic or class of people is easier because there are fewer barriers of difference to overcome. Differences within the church slow us down, they don't speed us forward in rapid growth. Going slow will be essential to bringing people into a greater vision

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[327] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 49–50.

[328] Dougherty, Martí, Ferguson, "Racial Dynamics of Congregations and Communities," 346.

[329] Dougherty, Martí, Ferguson, "Racial Dynamics of Congregations and Communities," 346.

[330] In a study conducted by Dougherty, Martí, Ferguson in which they tracked and compared longitudinal data from over 20,000 United Methodist congregations in the United States between 1990 and 2010 paired with census tract data for the same time period, they conclude that within the UMC multicultural congregations are now showing greater rates of growth than primarily white American congregations, 368–369.

for life together and to overcoming the deep-seated perspectives and preferences that keep us from fellowship across culture and race. The intercultural church will therefore not appeal to pastors and church boards who fear conflict, loss, or whose primary concern is numeric growth. While church growth matters within most denominations, an intercultural strategy seeks to grow disciples into a more culturally intelligent and interdependent expression of the Christian Church over time for the sake of bearing witness to the reconciling power of God. This will require a shift in the focus of leaders (pastors, church board, ministry coordinators, and staff) from numeric growth to growing people into a people of reconciliation and peace. This qualitative growth orientation can prove costly and presents the real threat of people leaving the church who do not wish to share in this expression for the local church. The realization of the significant barriers and challenges before us must therefore be met with faith in the power of the Triune God to enable us to work toward a love of diversity while incarnating unity in faith and mission. Realizing just how difficult it is to become an intercultural church should bring us first to our knees before God who makes all things possible.

Rationale: Prayer Enables us to Wait Well

Many of Jesus' parables in the gospels on the kingdom of God is about waiting well for the return of Christ (Matt. 25: parables of the Bridesmaids, Talents, Judgment of Sheep and Goats). Such waiting is not passive but is better understood as learning to live expectantly by embodying the ultimate healing anticipated upon the return of Christ in our everyday relationships. One of the primary ways we learn to wait well is through prayer. The command of Jesus to his disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit is relevant, as the temptation is to act without God's leading, empowering and gifting. Just as the disciples needed to wait for the

Spirit's outpouring, the leadership, staff, and pastors of the local church must also discern the significance of waiting on God in prayer. Prayer is then not passivity, but it is the first step and means to engaging in the work of God as participants to his reconciling mission. So, we begin not without a plan, but in prayer.

Posture: Thinking Us and Not Me

The proclivity within all of us is to begin with what matters to 'me' and such thinking often comes at the cost of what is in the best interest of others. The idea that the individual matters more than the group is a characteristic of the self-centeredness that defines large segments of Western society, and all too often rears its head within the activity of the local church. During the Covid-19 pandemic when all public gatherings required masks to be worn, some congregants refused to attend worship services because they considered the mask mandate an infringement on their personal rights. Such a self-centered perspective is contrary to the witness of the early church according to the Bible (Acts 2:42–47). The early Christian communities prayed together, ate together, shared in life together, and were accountable and responsible for the care and well-being of everyone within the Christian community. To begin with prayer is to intentionally shift from what matters to me to a posture of what is best for the broader community in accordance with God's will.

Posture: Desiring Community

We may not desire to engage others cross-culturally for several reasons. Yet prayer has proven effective in moving people into relationship and friendship with those unlike them. The authors of the book *Compassion* assert that the posture of praying with others is so powerful that

it can enable solidarity with those who suffer and even with our enemies.[331] While the attraction to sameness will always be appealing, we should desire cross-cultural friendships because it can transform us into people who see the beauty of God in those unlike us. In the absence of such desire prayer becomes the instrument to reform our desires and will for that which we may avoid or feel estranged from (Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11). This will not mean that personal prayer and spiritual disciplines become irrelevant, but that these disciplines will be rooted in a reforming of our need for communion with others.

Posture: Learning to Listen to God & the Other

Praying with others also teaches us how to listen and know the other better. This knowledge is entrusted to us in the sacred practice of listening in prayer through which their concerns and burden becomes known and shared.[332] This is possible because the Holy Spirit, who the Bible describes as praying on our behalf even when we cannot, "prays in us and is the Spirit by whom all human beings are brought together in unity and community" (Rom. 8:26–27).[333] While praying corporately can been challenging for those who are accustomed to private prayers that focus on the individual, corporate prayer enables listening to the needs of the other in ways that enable empathy, understanding, and facilitates connection. Corporate prayer can serve as a legitimate means of educating and informing the congregation concerning the realities and experiences that many immigrant people have faced in their countries of origin. Such forms of corporate prayer also exposes immigrants to the corporate life of prayer within the church that

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[331] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 106.

[332] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 106–107.

[333] McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 106.

bears witness to the concerns of all people that extend across cultures, races, and geographic borders. The corporate nature of prayer is then a means through which immigrants discern the church's global concern for the care and provision of the other including people from the homeland's immigrants originate from. In corporate prayer, immigrants hear that their concerns and needs matter to all. Corporate prayer can also serve as a remarkable testimony to the faithfulness of some immigrants as it reveals the strength and resilience of those within our congregation who have remained faithful followers of Christ despite persecution, oppression, or challenges that most in Canada have not experienced.

Posture: Considering Confession

For most evangelical Christians the idea of "confession," is a Roman Catholic practice that is largely irrelevant within the Protestant Church. Yet, James 5:16 states clearly that we ought to "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." Pope Francis' recent visit to Canada was aimed at seeking reconciliation with the Indigenous people of Canada. His confession was a humbling yet needed expression of the true Christian faith and serves as an example to all Christians as to the significance of public and corporate confession for enabling reconciliation and modelling authentic Christian character.

The early church was challenged to practice mutual confession as a needed pathway to healing and reconciliation (James 5:16). The theology of restoration as outlined in chapter five of the book of James in the New Testament is simple yet powerful; unconfessed sin keeps us from restoration, confessed sin enables effectual prayers and God's healing. The sin of systemic racism and white supremacy that have long persisted within Western society and the Church

must be confessed if we wish to realize a just intercultural expression of the Church. Prayer can transform the intercessor as much as it seeks to change the object of their intercession.[334] Prayer can therefore become a powerful means to confront our personal bias and prejudice so that we may place ourselves in a humble posture to be reconciled to one another. We must then be open, willing, and obedient when prayer leads us to confess our prejudice, pride, and privilege. Desmond Tutu famously said during the TRC hearings in South Africa: "there is no future without forgiveness" and this is true for all who seek to live as faithful followers of Jesus in pursuit of justice and racial equality for all people.[335] To be reconciled to the other begins with confession in prayer but does not end there. How we relate after forgiveness and justice have occurred is the way to deepening and trusted friendship with one another.[336] The work of reconciliation is the way of life for the church who have found its hope in the grace and mercy extended to us through Jesus Christ and goes beyond making peace: "Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all of creation to flourish."[337] Woodley invites us to discern the importance of discerning the heart of God through prayer that enables us to move toward reconciliation and unity: "The only thing that will allow us to embrace each other and celebrate our differences is if we can catch a glimpse of God's heart and do it for Him. What better gift can we give back to God than to agree to His plans and live

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[334] McNeil, Morrison, and Nouwen, *Compassion,* 104.

[335] Tutu, *No Future*, 255.

[336] Brenda Salter McNeil, Eugene Cho, and J. Derek McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 21.

[337] McNeil, Cho and McNeil, *Roadmap,* 22.

according to His directions."[338] Leading people to be reconciled must stem from the experience and knowledge of God's love and this must be discerned through attentiveness to his Spirit in prayer and to the needs of others for community. Such attentiveness is the starting point to discerning God's love and to enabling us to love and be reconciled to others. It is out of prayerful listening that discernment is gained but more importantly, that we affirm the experience, challenges, and needs of others.

Practice: Prayers of the People

Scripted Corporate Prayer (Prayers of the People) that is comprehensive in scope and includes the global, national, and local contexts can be a meaningful means of fostering empathy, understanding, and respect for all people within the local church (Appendix C). As has already been noted, corporate prayer holds significant potential to transform a congregation into a people who listen and care about all people regardless of race or country of origin. In our Sunday morning worship services, we have intentionally begun to pray corporately beyond the needs and challenges of our local church, city, and nation. Through these scripted prayers, written by a diversity of congregants from different ages, gender and race, we have embraced a comprehensive and formative approach to corporate prayer that is inclusive and representative of the entire congregation. Beginning with the global, moving on to the national, and finally culminating with the concerns and challenges within the local church context, these prayers empower understanding by conveying a broader perspective of our faith helping all to pray

[338] Woodley, *Living in Color,* 163.

beyond the immediate or the personal, for the needs of the Global Church and the challenges all people face across the globe.[339]

Practice: Teaching People How to Pray Together

We see in the gospel of Matthew that Jesus taught his disciples how to pray (Matt.6:9–13), despite being devout Jews who were accustomed to praying three times a day. Jesus teaches them to pray the prayer of the kingdom, what we commonly refer to as the Lord's Prayer. It is easily assumed that prayer comes naturally to most and in all that the church teaches, we tend to neglect teaching people how to pray in accordance with God's will. The key to this kingdom prayer is the expressed longing for God's kingdom and will to be done (vs. 6:10) and our willingness to seek forgiveness for our sins and offer forgiveness to others for the sins that are committed against us (vs. 6:12) while learning to be content for that which is provided as 'daily bread.' The Lord's prayer is a model for prayer that orients us first toward the desire and will of God for our lives and then toward restored and reconciled relationships with others. It is also a prayer that is corporate in nature, requiring us to prayer to "our Father" and so doing reject the idea that we come before God as autonomous individuals rather than members of the Christian family of whom God is Father of all. Including the Lord's Prayer in our corporate worship, as a prayer to conclude or begin meetings or small groups, can be a simple yet effective way of orienting parishioners to the model of prayer Jesus gave his disciples. Introducing people to listening to God and others through meditation on scripture can also become a meaningful way

[339] We employ a template for corporate prayer in the form of Prayers of the People and invite various congregants to prepare a weekly prayer.

of moving us from prayer as a monologue to prayer as dialogue and from prayer as an individual to prayers as a people.

Practice: Drawing Upon the Tradition of Christian Prayers

While most evangelical Christians are familiar with extemporaneous prayer, the Christian tradition is rich in prayers written by the faithful who have gone before us. These prayers are a gift to the church as they can provide a "continuous link of worship between the early Christians and ourselves."[340] The content and pattern can also provide a helpful template to teach others how to write prayers for personal and corporate worship today. More pertinently, prayers derived from non-western Church traditions can become an effective way of giving voice to diversity and rooting the corporate prayer life of the local church in a broader and more inclusive Christian tradition. These prayers can be used in weekly worship services, small group meetings, and where prayer is welcomed within the life of the congregation.

VALUE 2: CULTIVATING CROSS CULTURAL FRIENDSHIP

Rationale: Cross-Cultural Friendship Enables Perspective

For Newbigin, cross-cultural friendships enabled him to see the world beyond his British culturally conditioned worldview. Meaningful engagement across cultures can similarly enable those within multicultural church settings to gain critical distance from their own culture in order to see what is not easily observable from within their lived experience. While Peter's prejudice

[340] John Birch, "Ancient Christian Prayers," *Faith and Worship*, accessed November 10, 2022, https://www.faithandworship.com/early_Christian_prayers.htm#gsc.tab=0.

was overturned in a dramatic fashion through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius, such immediate transformation is unlikely for most of us in the local church context. Newbigin's experience over time proves to be a more realistic and accessible experience as his culturally conditioned perspectives were transformed over time through immersion in the foreign culture of India. It is through sustained cross-cultural friendships that his cultural blindness was revealed, and he realized that his Christian faith "was not untouched by cultural idolatry."[341] If we are to embody cultural diversity as a value, the place of cross-cultural friendships will become significant to transforming the larger church into a people who values and longs for unity across differences. While the church leadership cannot mediate such relationships, it will be imperative that they lead by example and become intentional in developing cross-cultural friendships with those within and outside the congregation. The influx of immigrants within the church makes cross cultural engagement and friendships accessible and possible.

Posture: Humility Enables Learning

Humility is essential to the pursuit of cross-cultural friendship as it places us in the posture where we become willing and able to learn from others. In his brilliant book "Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership," Dickson notes that humility creates the capacity for growth because it places us before others as those as those who are able and willing to learn from them.[342] Christian engagement with the Indigenous people of Canada through the residential

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[341] Goheen and Wright, *Church and its Vocation*, 140.

[342] John Dickson, *Humilitas*: *A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 35

school system reveals the posture of European pride and cultural superiority that disregarded the indigenous ways of knowing. While instruction will always be a part of congregational life and the primary role of pastors and teachers, discerning the potential that others have to teach us from within their own cultural experience and perspectives can facilitate trust and growth within us and them.

Posture: Patience Holds Promise

It took decades of immersion in the culture of the other to see what Newbigin eventually recognized as his own ethnocentric bias toward other cultural expressions of the Christian faith. Most Euro-Canadians within our local church will likely never live in a foreign land like India for a long period of time. Yet through the gift of immigration and cultural diversity now present within the local church they don't have to. Euro-Canadians can step into relationships with immigrant others. These cross-cultural relationships hold the potential to become transformative to both the immigrant and non-immigrant but will require patience and intention as meaningful friendship takes time to develop and trust is not quickly earned.

Practice: Becoming A Guest

Entering the space of the other is not easy, especially for those who are accustomed to being hosts and not guests in society. Yet Jesus more often comes to the other as a guest and not as a host: Luke 19:1–10, Jesus as a guest in the home of Zacchaeus the tax collector, Luke 10:38–42, Jesus as guest in the home of Martha and Mary. Gomis says this of Jesus: "While he has all wealth, authority, and power at his disposal as a member of royalty, he refuses to use anything for his own benefit … He refuses to continually act as the host but willingly becomes

the guest so that others may share in his resources, and they may serve as host."[343] There is a vulnerability in being a guest because we become dependent on the other.[344] Being a guest requires laying down our power and learning how to receive so the other may be empowered as host. While pastors and church leaders cannot enforce cross-cultural engagement, we can intentionally respond to invitations to join those unlike us in their homes and to receive their hospitality.

Practice: Serving Together

Research conducted by the Flourishing Congregations Institute at Ambrose University, shows that one of the most effective ways for people to connect meaningfully within the life of a congregation is when they serve alongside others.[345] Serving together proved generative of new relationships and friendships when during the last stage of construction of our church facility in 2018 we relied heavily upon our volunteers to assist with installing carpets, laying sod, painting walls, and many other construction tasks. During this period cross-cultural friendships were formed that would otherwise not have happened. To this day many of those friendships still endure. A common task that can be accomplished by people from all walks of life can provide common ground for community development and friendship.

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[343] Sunberg and Gomis, *Color,* 57.

[344] Sunberg and Gomis, *Color,* 55.

[345] Greg Nakaska, et al "Discipleship in Canadian Congregations," *Flourishing Congregations Institute*, accessed November 8, 2022, https://www.flourishingcongregations.org/_files/ugd/68e091_0221a3fdc1cd4dcb909751734409cc39.pdf

VALUE 3: EMPOWERING CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

Rationale: People of Influence can Become Catalyst for Change

Catalysts are those who hold power and have influence over a group of people. A primary perspective that derives from Peter's encounter with Cornelius, (Acts 10–11) is that both men became catalysts for transformation within their respective communities. Cornelius as the leader over his household and Peter as a leader in the Jerusalem Church. By the Spirit of God's initiative, both men are drawn into a larger story that will influence the community they are a part of. While the Spirit is the catalyst for the transformation of Peter and Cornelius, they also became catalysts for community transformation as what God sought to do in them was not just for them. According to the scriptures the entire household of Cornelius was saved and baptized by the Spirit (Acts 10). The witness of Peter to the Jerusalem Church points the church away from its exclusive views of Gentiles to becoming a more accepting and affirming people within the Christian community (Acts 15).

Posture: Catalysts Are Guests

Witness and testimony arise from experience and encounter in the presence of the other. We can only testify to that which we have also experienced. Likewise, Peter can only testify to the inclusion of Gentiles because he had a first-hand experience of seeing the Spirit's outpouring upon Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. Peter left where he lived and entered into the territory and space that was unfamiliar to him. Despite the historical and cultural rift that kept Jews from Gentiles, entering the space of the other as a guest enabled a fresh revelation of God and a new and needed revelation of the other.

Posture: Catalysts Pray and are Led by the Spirit

A common factor in the formation of the early church is the significant role that prayer played. Great revivals throughout history can be traced back to movements of prayer. Both Peter and Cornelius are described in Acts as men of prayer (Acts 4:24, 10:2) and prayer remains a significant feature for renewal and change. Catalysts for community transformation are to be people of prayer who are willing to be led by the Spirit of God through prayer like Peter. Catalysts are not necessarily people who have always been drawn to the other but have learned how to listen for the prompting of the Spirit and have learned to obey when the Spirit leads them into unknown territory, places, and people.

Practice: Testimony in the Church

Just as Peter, Barnabas and Paul played instrumental roles in influencing the Jerusalem Church toward an inclusive view of Gentiles; so can those respected within the local church become catalytic voices. Just as Peter, Barnabas and Paul shared their testimony within the Jerusalem Church, catalysts within Skyview Church must be given opportunities to share their experience and their perspectives within the larger Christian community. Just as Peter testified to that which he had witnessed in the home of Cornelius there are catalysts among us who have experienced the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon their lives and who are discerning of the Spirit's activity in the lives of others. Giving the opportunity for such women and men to speak into the life of the congregation can be a key means of bridging gaps between cultures and connecting people to the emerging intercultural vision for the church.

Practice: Finding Catalysts Among us!

This may not always be apparent but using the criteria listed above: who holds influence, assumes the posture as guest and learner, is discerning of the Spirit's leading in prayer, and are already engaged in cross-cultural friendship, we can discern catalyst in our midst.

VALUE 4: LEARNING TOGETHER

Rationale: Reading the Bible in Community Confronts our Bias

Scripture is the basis for any articulation of the Christian faith and for our understanding of the mission of the local church. Given how the Bible has been used to justify segregation and the assimilation of diverse cultures and people, the church desiring to incarnate an intercultural approach to the mission of God must learn to read scripture in ways that guard against such exclusive and individualistic perspectives. One such approach is to learn to read scripture together alongside diverse others. A Euro-Canadian's understanding of: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:8), will differ significantly from a Pakistani refugee's understanding of the text who recently fled his home country following persecution by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) because of his adherence to the Christian faith.[346]

The key to reading scripture together is therefore learning how to listen, not only to what the text says, but to the implications of the text within the lived experience of the other. We do not only ask what the Bible means to me, but what does it mean for the other. By intentionally

[346] Azeem Bhatti, testimony shared at Skyview Church during a worship service, June 2020.

making room to listen to perspectives that are different to our own we assume the posture of learners and such listening is both empowering to others and transformative to our hearing and understanding of the biblical text.

Rationale: Empowering Racialized Voices Enables Participation

Law points out that research conducted on the nature of communication between people from collectivist societies versus people from individualistic cultures reveal that people deriving from collectivist societies often assume the posture of hearer and are less likely to share their opinions or perspectives in group settings.[347] This is proven true when in our monthly church board meetings opportunity is given for response to a devotional thought shared and board representatives who are immigrants from collectivist cultures are usually the last to respond, if they so choose. When facilitating discussions within a Bible study group the immigrant may remain silent, not because they have no perspective to share, but have been culturally conditioned to assume the posture of learner. Additionally, for many immigrants English is not their first language and they may not feel comfortable or confident to express themselves in a second language. With this challenge in mind Eric Law developed a particular method to facilitate communication to aid participation from immigrants within multicultural church settings which he calls "Mutual Invitation" (Appendix D).[348] Mutual invitation is based on a simple approach to communication that begins with inviting the other to speak and to empower them with the option to either pass or speak as well as to nominate who they would like to have

[347] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell*, 113.

[348] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell*, 113–114.

speak next. This simple exercise breaks the linear form of communication by which those most comfortable and confident in speaking out take the lead. Mutual invitation empowers racialized voices to share their views but to also use their voice to educate and empower others.

Posture: Reading the Bible as Sojourners

The Bible is a sojourners story first heard and read by migrant communities.[349] Likewise, the God that the people of Israel encounter from beginning to end is a sojourning God who travels with them and is often leading ahead of them. The incarnation of Christ can also be understood as a migrant movement, Jesus leaves his heavenly dwelling with the Father to enter humanity's home. The Holy Spirit throughout the Bible is the wind, the breath of God who is given to be with us. The people of God are sojourners because the trinitarian God of scripture is a sojourning God. God's movement is not without purpose or design but is aimed toward reconciliation, the shalom and healing of the nations. Recent immigrants and displaced people within the church may read scripture from the posture of sojourners more naturally than others given their migrant experience. For some immigrants, reading the Bible may even evoke "feelings of estrangement, loss and disorientation."[350] Yet, for many who do not know the experience of displacement through migration, the temptation to view God and his people as settled, static, and immoveable is alluring. Such a view may imply that change and transformation is not sought, security and control may supplant the biblical invitation to be led by the Spirit, into new and unknown relationships and spaces. Yet, through the experience of the

[349] Marzouk, *Intercultural Church*, 46–47.

[350] Marzouk, *Intercultural Church*, 46.

immigrant the non-immigrant can learn to see and understand God and his people in a fresh way by becoming open to the way in which the Christian faith invites us to hold loosely to material things that hold us back from following God's leading and to become more open to the leading of God's Spirit.

Practice: Mutual Invitation (Appendix D)

Training and equipping ministry leaders, church board members, and staff on how to facilitate discussions employing mutual invitation as a means of enabling non-linear communication and empowering racialized voices can be instrumental to forming intercultural trust. We have already implemented the use of this format for communication within our staff meetings and will be training our current ministry coordinators in how to use mutual invitation in their respective roles also.

Practice: Mass Communication

Discerning creative ways to facilitate interpersonal communication through media, art, and other mediums can enable multiple ways to share and receive information across cultural differences. Employing such creative communication in our corporate worship services and in the preaching of God's word can facilitate a more effective way of communicating across cultures that enables those less proficient in English to access information and to contribute through participation.

Practice: Keeping Communication Simple

When we communicate in print, online, or in person, ensuring that we use basic and accessible language will be key to communicating well within a diverse congregation. Theological terms that are complex should be simplified to ensure preaching, teaching and church wide communication that is simple and accessible to all.

VALUE 5: RECLAIMING CULTURAL PRACTICES

Rationale: Culture is Redeemable

Indigenous scholar Richard Twiss challenges the Christian Church in North America to reconsider the potential that Indigenous cultural practices present to worship God and to make Him known to others.[351] If God is the God of all people and culture, no person or culture is beyond his redeeming purposes. For healthy diversity, the local church must examine the prejudicial way in which the dominant culture views other cultures. The congregation will need to be transformed to make room for the diverse expression of our faith as God can be glorified through the diversity of all cultures.[352] Culture is neither good nor bad and in a general sense, it helps to define us as belonging to a particular group of people. Culture also includes the normative ways of acting and thinking within a group that is shaped by relationships, language, art, music, religion, and economic and political systems.[353] Yet, certain cultural practices have been deemed inferior or vilified within the church. In Canada, the indigenous prayer practices of

[351] Twiss, *One Church*, 77.

[352] Twiss, *One Church*, 75.

[353] Twiss, *One Church*, 75.

sweat lodges and praying with an eagle feather have often been dismissed by the church as pagan and anti-Christian. Yet, these practices are viewed by the Indigenous as meaningful ways of praying to the Creator. In Indigenous spirituality, sweat lodges function as "a place of spiritual refuge and mental and physical healing."[354] Praying with an eagle feather is likewise redemptive because the eagle is a symbol for ascending prayer. Just as an eagle ascends to the heavens, praying with an eagle feather symbolizes the ascent of indigenous prayers to their Creator.[355] While the Indigenous are largely absent from our churches we can learn from them, a posture that the Church historically rejected. The European Church was the teacher and the Indigenous the student. Yet, becoming an intercultural church requires a renewed perspective on culture; a redemptive one.

Rationale: Sanctifying Cultural Practices is not Syncretism

Twiss identifies three ways in which the Church has historically responded to Indigenous culture: absorption, syncretism and rejection. Absorption is where pagan beliefs and idolatrous practices are overlooked or tolerated in the church. Syncretism is the attempted union of different or even opposing principles or practices presuming they have a similar intent. Rejection is dismissing the outsiders' culture as pagan and ungodly with little or no redeeming value.[356] The fear of syncretism is a primary stumbling block for Christians when considering Indigenous or

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[354] Steve Addison, "The Sweat Lodge," *Mission Frontiers*, (March 3, 2020), https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-sweat-lodge.

[355] Ray Aldred, "Canadian Indigenous Realities and the Canadian Church," online presentation, September 22, 2021, https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/canadian-indigenous-realities-and-the-canadian-church-with-ray-aldred-tickets-165148287975.

[356] Twiss, *One Church*, 76.

other cultural practices in the life of worship within a church.[357] In response to this fear aboriginal Christian scholars Adrian Jacobs, Richard Twiss, and Terry LeBlanc cautions:

"As Native leaders it is we who must be careful that we do not allow Biblical ignorance to lead to an unfounded fear of syncretism among ourselves. We must counsel, pray and dialogue to prevent syncretism from becoming an emotionally defined standard for a type of modern-day inquisition meant to root and burn out of Native Christians any tie to their culture and tradition. When we do this, what we are doing is basically denying God's handiwork in us."[358]

Instead of the fear of syncretism, these scholars advance a renewed faith in the scriptural doctrine of sanctification by which persons, objects and practices may be set aside, i.e. sanctified, for God's use and purpose.[359] Importantly, they note that this approach begins with taking scripture seriously, requiring biblical discernment, wise counsel, prayer and dialogue to clarify which elements within Indigenous culture can be used as instruments in service of the worship of God.[360]As all cultures possess that which is good and God honoring and that which is not, discernment is key to seeing the potential within all cultures to reveal and bear witness to the one true God. The fear of syncretism deprives the intercultural church of the richness of creativity in worship which reveals the Triune God himself, who created man in his own image (Gen. 1:28).

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[357] Adrian Jacobs, Terry LeBlanc, and Richard Twiss, "Culture, Christian Faith and Error," *Journal of North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies* volume 1, (2003), 17, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiG0V181224000981&site=ehost-live.

[358] Jacobs, LeBlanc, and Twiss, "Culture, Christian Faith and Error," 17–18.

[359] Jacobs, LeBlanc, and Twiss, "Culture, Christian Faith and Error," 18–19.

[360] Jacobs, LeBlanc, and Twiss, "Culture, Christian Faith and Error," 18–19.

Article ten within the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene contains the denominations articulation of the doctrine of sanctification. The doctrine is primarily defined as "the work of God which transforms believers into the likeness of Christ."[361] Though the article does not include any articulation of sanctification as it relates to engaging culture redemptively, the Bible bears witness to this through the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is our compass for how to engage diverse others, his life reflected a perspective of holiness that through his touch transformed the ordinary (people and things) into vessels of worship and praise of God.

Posture: Becoming Open Minded

It is clear from the perspective shared thus far that historically cultural superiority has led to the ignorance, limitation, or exclusion of non-European cultural practices and traditions within the church and the practice of the Christian faith. Discerning that all cultures have traditions and practices that are redeemable and can be used to glorify God should make us open to fresh and new ways of worship, prayer, and formation. This will require discernment as not everything in culture is useful within the local church and to the expression of Christian faith; but being open minded and discerning of the unique and diverse gifts within the church can enrich our worship and affirm the value of others within the congregation.

Posture: Valuing Discernment

Indigenous Christian elders caution that all things must be discerned in light of biblical authority. This does not necessarily mean that we will find a scripture that names the practice of

[361] "Article 10" in the *Church of the Nazarene Manual 2017–2021*," Church of the Nazarene accessed November 8, 2022, https://2017.manual.nazarene.org/paragraph/p10/s1/.

praying with an eagle feather or praying in a sweat lodge. Yet, the discernment required is whether the cultural practice under consideration contradicts or opposes biblical values. Second, thought must be given to the applicability of such a practice in relation to the constituency within the local church. Practices and traditions incorporated into the life of worship must reflect the cultures of those within the community to avoid tokenism and to ensure that the cultural representatives hold the responsibility to educate and inform the larger congregation on the value and meaning of the practice.

Posture: Taking Risks

In his compelling book: "Your Church is Too Safe," Buchanan asks: "When did we start making it our priority to be safe instead of dangerous, nice instead of holy, cautious instead of bold, self-absorbed instead of counting everything loss in order to be found in Christ?"[362] Undoubtedly, not everything we attempt will work within the life of the church. The fear of failure or loss can keep the church from experimenting and innovating in ways that empower and include diverse cultural expressions in worship and mission. The church who desires to incarnate a biblical diversity of race and culture whilst maintaining mutual respect and love for all must work toward creating a culture of risk-taking through trusting relationships. The key to taking risks is to build relational trust by developing cross cultural friendships that can sustain change and even absorb failure.

[362] Mark Buchanan, *Your Church is Too Safe: Why Following Christ Turns the World Upside-Down*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 9.

Practice: Celebrating Culture and Diversity

Participating in social and community events aimed at promoting the cultural, culinary, and artistic diversity within the NHS has proven effective to bridging the gap between the church and our neighbors. Stepping into the neighborhood as those seeking to understand and learn from others can be helpful to cultivating trust and to overcoming stereotypes concerning the diversity of people and their traditions within the surrounding neighborhood. As Canadian interest in religion dwindles and less people are likely to turn to the church as a trusted resource, discerning places and spaces that enable Christians to interact with non-Christians as learners can reorient the church toward the needed posture of humility and openness toward cultural others.

Practice: Establish A Diversity Taskforce

Not everything within a given culture is useful to Christian worship and ministry. Ongoing discernment and evaluation of cultural practices and expressions that are appropriate and meaningful to the local church will be necessary. A task force comprising theological expertise and reflective of the emerging cultural diversity of people within the church can provide the needed assessment and determination for new and culturally different ministry practices within the church. More pertinently, such a task force can also serve as catalyst for innovation and change as the team will constitute a diverse group of people representative of the racial and cultural diversity within the local church.

VALUE 6: TABLE FELLOWSHIP

Rationale: Christ's Table can Transform Us

Historically the Lord's Table became a source of exclusion of African Christians from communion with their white counterparts in nineteenth-century Apartheid South Africa.[363] Yet, in the Gospels the tables Jesus sat at became places of reconciliation, healing, liberation, restitution, and friendship (Luke19:1–10; 24:30; Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:22–23; John 12:1–3). Table fellowship was also a key feature of the first Church's life together in Acts 2:42–47. For many evangelical Christians, the Lord's Table is anything but transformative or healing and most eucharistic meals are somber affairs with the call to remembrance the only meaning attached to the meal. Within the Orthodox Church, the Eucharist is liturgically upheld as a joyous sacrament through which the people belonging to Jesus Christ enter into his joy which they consider the foundation for the church's witness to the world.[364] In the Orthodox view the Lord's Table is not about remembering what was but rather remembering what was made possible through the sacrificial life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. McKnight points out that we often miss the point of the Lord's Supper because we forget the context and connection between the Lord's Table and the Jewish Passover.[365] Passover was an eight-day celebration of liberation from Egyptian oppression for the Jewish people. It was a time of joyous remembering of what God has done to enable their freedom from slaveholders; they were no longer slaves because God

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[363] Ackermann, "Becoming Fully Human," 14–16.

[364] Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018), 27.

[365] Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life* Together (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 100–101.

acted to ensure their freedom to worship and follow him! Similarly, when we sit at the table with the Lord, we are invited to celebrate the liberating power of God through Jesus Christ from all that binds and holds us from fellowship with God and each other. When we reflect on the message of the church within our prevailing society, we must confess the absence of such joy. Our witness has often been marked by exclusion, defined by our rights and privileges rather than defined by the gracious invitation of the Lord to partake of the Bread of Life and to be filled. We are tempted to look back nostalgically believing that the best is in our past, without realizing that what has been done through the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, enables a new creation and life marked by freedom and liberation and joy!

Rationale: Eating Often Sustains Us for Life Together

Just as our physical bodies require daily nourishment so does our life of faith in community with others. While Christian baptism is understood as the sacrament of initiation into the life of faith the Lord's Table is understood as the sacrament that sustains us for life together. At Skyview Church we sit at the Lord's Table once a month. Many within the church are accustomed to this schedule yet there are a few congregants who desire a more frequent participation of the sacrament in our worship service recognizing the sacrament as an invaluable source of spiritual nourishment. John and Charles Wesley, viewed the Lord's Table as a "means of grace."[366] The Wesleys believed that through the work of the Holy Spirit we first become recipients of God's grace and then learn to participate with God in nurturing our growth in Christlikeness through attending to his Table. So convinced were the Wesleys of the formative

[366] "Our Wesleyan Tradition," Point Loma Nazarene University, accessed April 30, 2022, https://www.pointloma.edu/centers-institutes/wesleyan-center/our-wesleyan-tradition.

power of the Lord's Table that they advocated for daily adherence to it. Charles and John even went as far as to publish a collection of 166 hymns to be used as preparation in worship services for those who would receive the eucharistic meal daily.

In his book on cultural liturgies and formation, Smith contends that: "liturgies, whether 'sacred' or 'secular' – shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires."[367] Schmemann further grounds our understanding of liturgy within a communal framework when he states: " liturgy is a means and action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals – a whole greater than the sum of its parts."[368] Smith and Schmemann thus point us to the formative and corporate potential that the Lord's Table has. Formative, in that what is rehearsed, received, and believed when we drink from the cup and eat the bread has the potential to shape us into a reconciling community of people. The idea that formation requires time and consistency is revealed through the experience of Israel, the disciples, and the early church. The formation of Christ-like character throughout scripture takes time and is about becoming a holy people and not just a holy person. But what Smith contends, is that such formation requires intention, articulation, and direction which liturgies, such as that offered through the Lord's Table, can provide. What is said and rehearsed therefore matters as much as how often it is shared. We come as individuals to be reformed as a people. We come often to the Table because formation require practice. Our reception of the grace extended to us from Christ at His table is thus a grace for me and a grace for all. We are being made into the people of God who entirely gave himself

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[367] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 25.

[368] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 25.

to us through Christ so that we may learn how to give ourselves to each other faithfully. The body that is broken and given to us is given so that we may become the body broken for the nourishment of the world. The Lord's Table then presents us with the real opportunity to be formed into a people who live for the healing of others; we come to his table and there eat together so that we may better love God, each other and our world.

Posture: Learning to Be Guests

"The guest does not untie the goat," is a Senegalese proverb that explains the posture that is often hard for representatives from the dominant culture to assume.[369] In Senegalese culture it is presumed that when you arrive as a guest you come to receive the meal that the host has prepared. Goats are a source of milk and meat and so it would not make sense, nor would it be culturally appropriate, for the guest to assume the role of the host by untying the goat in preparation for the meal. Yet, for most Euro-Canadians hospitality is often offered from the posture of the host. The position of host can easily become one of power and control: the host invites the other into their home, serves the other from their resources, and sets the menu for what is to be eaten. The position of the guest is one of receptivity and gratitude.

In the Gospels, Jesus often places himself before others as a guest, willing to receive the hospitality they have to offer. When we come to the Lord's Table Jesus is always the host, but he has also shown us what it means to be a guest willing to receive with joy that which is given in gratitude and love. At the Lord's Table, our attitudes should reflect the humility, receptivity, and gratitude reflective of guests. We receive from the Lord that which only he can provide, and we

[369] Sunberg and Gomis, *Color,* 63.

together give him thanks as joyous recipients irrespective of our racial or cultural differences. The Lord's Table is then a place of justice as all are treated equally and receive the same gracious gift from God, the body of Christ.

Practice: Open Hands and Hearts at the Lord's Table

A very practical way of enabling the right posture of humility and receptivity is to come to the Lord's Table with hands open to receive the elements. With open hands, we learn to wait to be served and not to grasp for that which is offered as gift. While Covid-19 has impacted how we now serve the bread and cup, the posture that most facilitates the right internal disposition are open hands, reflecting our understanding that we have not earned the mercy that reconciles us to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but that is generously given as gifts.

Practice: Immigrants as Co-Host at the Lord's Table

While we are all guests at the Lord's Table, including racialized minorities as those who assist in sharing the communion elements with others can be formative in two ways. First, it is empowering to those who may seldom feel that they have the resources to offer or serve a person from within the dominant culture. On the other, it enables the dominant cultural representative to receive from those whom they may not usually expect or anticipate have something to offer. The physical elements and the physical actions associated with receiving the eucharistic meal are intended to help us put our bodies as much as our minds in the posture and place of receptivity for the gifts of God and the gift of his people.

Practice: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

One of the ministry activities that have proven meaningful to forming cross-cultural friendship is an event organized by our hospitality ministry named: "Guess who's coming to dinner?" This event requires individuals and families within the congregation to register as either host or guest for a shared meal in each other's homes. This hospitality enables the diverse cultural groups within our congregation to meet others within the congregation whom they may not know in their respective homes. Neither host or guests determine who they will eat with and are assigned to each other. This event allows congregants from racialized backgrounds to serve as host and to share a meal from their culture. Simultaneously, this activity also enables those accustomed to being a host to enter the home of others as a guest. This reversal in role fosters receptivity, equality, and friendship.

VALUE 7: LEARNING TO SPEAK IN MANY TONGUES

Rationale: Native Tongues Matter

Marzouk notes that "an intercultural church is a church that welcomes and celebrates linguistic diversity as an integral part of the biblical vision for the church."[370] Language does however prove problematic to cross cultural engagement. As language is often a marker through which racialized peoples maintain some of their cultural identity, it is one of the primary sacrifices they make to assimilate within English speaking congregations. At Skyview our worship songs, preaching, and overall church communication is conducted in English. While

[370] Marzouk, *Intercultural Church,* 139.

most, if not all, immigrants who attend our church can communicate in English, English is not their first language. The appeal and familiarity of communicating and worshipping in their native tongue plays a significant role in why many immigrants opt to attend ethnic specific churches. At Skyview I've heard immigrants often lament the loss of being able to pray, to read scripture, to hear preaching, and to sing songs in their native tongue.

Rationale: Translation is not just about Language

The miracle of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–13) overcomes the language barrier through the outpouring of God's Spirit on ethnic Jews who are supernaturally empowered to speak to the diaspora of Jews gathered in Jerusalem in their native tongues (Acts 2:5–13). This miracle is one of translation, the gift of tongues (not glossolalia) is given so that the one true message of Jesus can be understood in all the dialects of those gathered in Jerusalem at Passover. While we may sense the improbability of such a Pentecost miracle of translation within the growingly diverse local church today, the work of translation is still needed and still possible. This will require a willingness within the local church to discern opportunities to communicate in multiple languages and in creative forms.

Posture: Communicating Beyond Speech

Eric Law gives thought to addressing the problem and offers that communication within a culturally diverse church should always encompass a broader perspective of the various forms of communication. He notes that verbal communication is a "biased form of communication, favoring people who have a strong sense of individual power and verbal ability, the majority of

whom are whites."[371] Law goes on to offer that what the church needs is to make communication more "holistic … we must learn to provide media by which people can see, hear, and touch each other when they communicate."[372] The aim is to facilitate two-way communication through the use of photographs, slides, posters, music, audio and videotapes, drawings, drama, and writings, which he names "group media."[373] In using group media a leader not only helps individuals express themselves more effectively but also addresses the power dynamics within multicultural settings where English-speaking competency often becomes the criteria and barrier to meaningful engagement and leadership.[374] While Law's group media approach still does not address the desire many share for singing, preaching and praying in their native tongues, it does offer an innovative and effective way to communicate through other mediums that lowers the need for English proficiency as criteria for meaningful exchange and dialogue.

Practice: Conversational ESL Classes

The demographic census data for the neighborhood surrounding the church facility indicate that the largest population of immigrants within the NHS are Chinese immigrants (see Appendix B). Immigrants from China are often not as fluent in English as other immigrant groups and can benefit from classes to aid their language proficiency. Having parishioners within our church facilitate these classes will not only help a particular racialized group become more proficient but brings English-speaking people into conversation with racialized minorities from

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[371] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell*, 90.

[372] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell*, 91.

[373] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell*, 92.

[374] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell*, 92.

whom they can also learn and develop friendships. The proposal I have in mind here is for a conversational approach to ESL that enables anyone with English proficiency, not just certified instructors, to assist in teaching the class. As the primary medium for learning is conversation , the potential for the formation of cross cultural friendship is made possible.

Practice: Group Media Communication

Law's proposal for the use of group media for two-way communication through the use of photographs, slides, posters, music, audio and videotapes, drawings, drama, and writings, may prove effective.[375] While such an approach will require creativity, forethought and intention, the use of various mediums for communication in group discussions, Bible studies and small groups will enable those less proficient in English to better express and communicate their thoughts. This form of facilitating communication can also be employed in other congregational settings including, church board meetings and in teaching and preaching events.

Practice: Foreign Language Classes

Given the multiple languages spoken within the local church the opportunity to explore foreign language classes taught by immigrants can prove to be a meaningful way to engage across cultures and to empower immigrants within the ministry of the local church to become teachers. Noting the diverse languages spoken within the surrounding neighborhood and the local church, will be essential to discerning which language classes should be offered.

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[375] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell*, 92.

VALUE 8: DISCERNING LIMINAL SPACE FOR COMMUNITY FORMATION

Rationale: Liminal Space Enables Connection

Anthropologist Victor Turner, building upon the work of Arnold Van Gennep who studied traditional cultures, identified three phases associated with rites of passages within collectivist cultures: separation, liminality, and reaggregation.[376] He defined separation as the stage of detaching from existing and embedded roles. In a tribal context, the young boy would have a specific role to play that was essential to his understanding of his place and purpose within the tribe as a child. To become a man, the boy would separate from the tribe to enter a ritually significant location, such as the bush. This is the liminal space defined by "marginalization or disestablishment."[377] The liminal stage is also a transformative space because it enables death and resurrection. Death because it is intended to bring an end to what was previously considered normative. Resurrection because it makes possible a new reality pertaining to the boy's status and identity.[378] The boy must symbolically die in order to emerge as a man. To complete this transformation the boy then exits the liminal stage and enters the final stage of reaggregation. Here, the former role and status as a child has died, enabling reintegration into the tribe as a man. One of the most significant observations that Turner offers is that within the liminal stage the potential for the formation of a new community of people becomes possible; he calls this 'communitas:' "a spontaneous, egalitarian and direct modality of human relationship

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[376] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 96.

[377] Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 28.

[378] Roxburgh, *Missionary Congregation*, 27.

from an area of common living."[379] As prior status and roles are no longer a hindrance, those in the liminal space are free from former prescriptions and power, enabling the opportunity for a new configuration of relationships.[380]

Liminal spaces arise within the lives of congregants when life takes an unexpected turn usually defined by some form of loss. The end of a relationship or marriage, a cancer diagnosis, the death of a loved one or of a cherished career. The impact of such life changes always has the potential to push people into isolation. Yet, over my years of counsel and supporting people through these challenging times as a pastor, I've noted the potential that loss has to connect people to others in the liminal place of loss. Recovering from significant loss is always difficult and usually takes time. In cases where people move through loss well, it is often because they do so with the help and camaraderie that stems from the mutual support and empathy of those acquainted with such loss. Those who can relate to someone experiencing loss and suffering have the opportunity for healing and friendship. The liminal space of life, therefore, creates the opportunity for the individual to experience community that would not have happened otherwise; a shared experience that enables a relationship that was previously improbable.

Rationale: Discerning the Gift of Cross-Cultural Friendship in Discomfort

The tendency in these liminal experiences of life is to look for a quick way out, to escape the discomfort. Yet, this urge can move people away from the potential to connect to others in authentic ways and find a community in which their pain and healing are shared. While most

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[379] Turner, *Ritual Process*, 96.

[380] Turner, *Ritual Process*, 97.

immigrants experience the liminality associated with immigration, the immigrant experience is largely inaccessible to those who have not left home and family behind in search of a better life. Yet, life's inevitable losses present us all with liminal experiences that have the potential for broadening our perspectives of community. If we are discerning enough, we can find the opportunity for cross cultural friendship in the dark and difficult places of life.

Rationale: Liminal Spaces in the Neighborhood Connect us to Neighbors

Notably, the liminal experience is one that can connect us to those in the church and to others in the broader neighborhood within which the church resides. Our colleagues, classmates and neighbors may never darken the door of our church sanctuary, but they may enter the liminal space of a grief share group, a divorce recovery group, English as a second language class, or alcoholics anonymous. The intercultural church that seeks to connect across cultures does so for the sake of the larger reconciliatory mission of God in the world. The church ought to remember that it exists for its non-members. While evangelism is often considered the ministry of sharing our faith, the liminal experience enables us to share our loss as a means of solidarity with those whom we would not elsewise encounter so that we together may draw closer to God. Such solidary is key to any articulation of the Christian faith that is shaped by the posture of servanthood and compassion.

Posture: Pointing to 'Communitas'

Parishioners who turn to me in times of crisis are often disappointed that life has not gone as planned and express their frustration when faced with life's setbacks. Consequently, there is very little room for God or others when life hands them the unexpected loss, sickness or change.

Seldom do I find that people are able to discern the potential for transformation or community unless such a possibility is presented to them. The gift of pastoral counsel can be to offer a theological perspective of formation, that encourages people in their present challenge to see the potential for Christian friendship and community (communitas). Communitas, according to Turner, is the space where human relationships can be birthed out of the shared experience.[381] Those who have gone through similar experiences of loss can become a source of understanding and friendship in seasons that often leave us feeling misunderstood and alone.

Posture: Paying Attention to Loss

Loss is no respecter of person and is truly indiscriminate affecting every age, gender, race, and culture. The reconciling mission of God should be the primary mission for the church. This means that reconciliation is not simply sought within the church for the sake of its constituents, but for the church to look beyond the already initiated for the lost sheep, coins, sons and daughters whom God loves. The church that wishes to embody reconciliation must pay attention to the losses, struggles, and challenges of life existent within the church and within its neighborhood and city. Knowing what these are will be key to connecting with those who would otherwise not enter our worship services.

Practice: Providing Pastoral Care

Those entrusted with the pastoral care and counsel of parishioners should always be mindful of the potential for transformation within the liminal experiences of loss and change.

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[381] Turner, *Ritual Process*, 96.

This will require a prayerful and wise approach to counsel rooted in a deep and genuine concern for their wellbeing and not simply viewed as a teaching moment. The art of pastoral care is to always point people to the hope they have in Christ and liminal moments in life reveal that even in the dark places of loss, God is present. While this may look different depending on the challenges people face, Christ centered community and friendship can play a significant role in providing care and support that extends beyond a pastor or counsellor.

Practice: Encouraging Support Groups

Support groups that are safe places for those experiencing loss can become another means of offering community to people in their most vulnerable and difficult seasons of life. Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous are truly liminal spaces in that Christian and non-Christian people can find the support and care they need. As the interest in Christianity diminishes within Canada, discerning the needs that are evident within the neighborhood and stepping into these needs as those who desire to help others, irrespective of whether they are interested in faith or not, can be a valuable and fruitful approach to outreach. Liminal Groups the church can offer include but is not limited to:

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Celebrate Recovery
- ESL for Newcomers to Canada
- Grief Share

Practice: Finding In-Between Spaces in the Neighborhood and Showing Up

While most of my reflection on the liminal space has focused on loss, Buchanan helps us to see that liminal spaces can also be in between places within our neighborhoods:

> "They're not biker houses or gay bars or country clubs. But they're not sanctuaries or fellowship groups or Bible studies either. They're something in the middle, where everyone's both comfortable and uncomfortable, where everyone's forced to adapt by a few degrees, but only by a few."[382]

As stated from the outset in this paper, the mission of the church is not to become intercultural, but an intercultural expression of the church can serve the reconciling mission of God in the world. Discerning opportunities outside of the church that may be uncomfortable for the average Christian to attend, can become a means of witness to God's self-giving love as made evident through Jesus Christ. He entered the home of the tax collector and sinner, was accused of being their friends, yet through fellowship with the least of these Jesus demonstrates a mission that takes us into uncomfortable places for the sake of showing love to all people created in the image of God. Moving into the neighborhood is needed more than ever before as attractional models for church no longer work in post-Christian Canada.

In-between Spaces in our context include:

- National Indigenous Day, celebrated on June 21st of each year as an event raising awareness concerning the history and culture of the Indigenous. This day is also an annual call to respond to and participate in the work of reconciliation with Indigenous people.
- Neighbor Day, which started in June 2014 to celebrate the incredible outpouring of support and generosity Calgarians demonstrated to their neighbors after the 2013 floods. On this day service projects and neighborhood clean-up is encouraged and culminates in celebrations and block parties throughout the city of Calgary.

[382] Buchanan, *Your Church is Too Safe*, 105–106.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

For over a century the Church of the Nazarene has been accustomed to sending missionaries to Africa, Asia, and other non-western cultures. Today the denomination stands in need of a revitalization in North America as more Canadians and Americans are claiming no faith or religious affiliation.[383] While Christianity is flourishing outside the Western world, immigration presents a real opportunity for renewal within the Nazarene Church in Canada. For this to happen the local church will need to approach diversity of race and culture as needed gifts fit for renewing the witness of the church in a post-Christian context from within the local congregation. The idea that immigrants need the West may be true from an economic vantage point, but the Canadian Church need immigrants. The discerning local church in pursuit of their discipling mission will see immigration and the growing diversity within society as a catalyst for renewal and witness in a post-Christian culture and polarizing world.

LIMITATIONS

Location may Limit the expression of the Intercultural Church but not the Need for Equality and Justice

The intercultural church framework presented thus far is contextually relevant to the Skyview Church with its emerging racial diversity. Yet, the values articulated within the

[383] "The Canadian Census 2021," Statistics Canada, accessed October 30, 2022, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.pdf?st=uOwTVsPB.

intercultural framework can be incorporated into the life of any church who desires to become a just and equal expression of the body of Christ. Notably, not every congregation is racially diverse as such an expression for the church relies upon a constituency of racially diverse people within the geographic area in which the church gathers. Rural churches may have little to no racial diversity and therefore aspiring to become an intercultural church will not reflect their demographic reality and any such attempt may prove inauthentic. While location can limit the expression of the intercultural church the Christian perspectives and attitudes that led to cultural assimilation or segregation of diverse people persists within congregations in Canada and the United States. The review of Black participation in the Church of the Nazarene for much of the twentieth century has shown how the denomination refused to address matters of racial injustice and inequality during the Jim Crow era. The denominations silence served to legitimize the segregation of Blacks within the church and broader society and this history has had a lasting impact with an alarming lack of racialized participation and representation on the USA/Canada region today. Pastors and church leaders must find intentional ways to confront these discriminatory perspectives and to educate their people on the value of racial and cultural diversity for Christian formation and mission in an ever-changing world. Irrespective of whether a church is rural, suburban, or urban, all churches in Canada cannot ignore what was done to the Indigenous people in the name of Christianity through which the Church was complicit to the denigration of Indigenous culture. We must therefore pursue expressions of the church that guard against exclusion of diverse people irrespective of regional location or racial configuration.

A primary factor to help any church leader or church board discern the need to become an intercultural church is to ask whether the congregation is representative of the people within the geographic locale it is located in. If a congregation does not reflect the demographic of their

surroundings in worship, pursuit of an intercultural church may prove helpful to reaching those within their reach. A second factor is to consider whether the current ministry of the church reflects the diversity of culture within the congregation. While racial differences are easier to discern cultural differences are not. Significantly, even if a local church lacks racial diversity and gather in a predominantly homogenous neighborhood, the historic precedents of Christian engagement with racialized people marked by European cultural superiority must still be addressed. The absence of racialized people should not be used as justification for non-engagement on matters of systemic racism, inequality, and injustice relating to racialized people. All churches must work toward a just and equal understanding of racial and cultural diversity as an authentic articulation of Christian faith irrespective of their location.

The Church of the Nazarene is a global denomination with churches spanning a diversity of culture and people. There are undoubtedly regions in the world that are less racially diverse than others. These regions may have far more culturally and racially homogenous churches. The argument offered here is that an intercultural church within the Western world is needed given the historical precedents of assimilation and subjugation of people and the present-day growth in racial diversity reflected within many Canadian neighborhoods. A church can be intentional and effective in addressing matters of racial inequality and injustice even if it is homogenous in worship in various places around the globe. Yet, where racial diversity exists, the church is called to reflect such diversity in non-assimilative and non-coercive ways. The diversity of people from a denominational perspective can then include homogenous and multicultural church communities. It is however the argument presented here that where North American neighborhoods are becoming racially diverse, the church can and should incarnate such diversity in worship and in mission.

Implementation

Changing what we Evaluate

An intercultural ministry framework demands that we evaluate growth differently. Instead of focusing on numeric growth, we discern growth in the quality of cross-cultural engagement and relationships amongst congregants. These measurements will be hard to discern and will require qualitive analysis through interviews, questionnaires, and open forum discussions, to discern progress, challenges, and opportunities.

Anticipating Loss and Learning from It

Loss of people will be inevitable as the church pursues an intercultural ministry framework. It will become increasingly important to determine how to navigate loss as this will impact the congregation and potentially place strain on the pastoral and church leadership. Things to consider are how will loss be communicated throughout the congregation and what will the process be to discern the cause and reasons for a person(s) departure. While engaging people who have decided to leave the church is not always pleasant or welcome, the courage to learn from their departure will be invaluable to navigating change well and to learning how to communicate and lead through change.

A Shared Vision

If the vision for an intercultural church is not shared by a core group of people within the church, it is likely destined to fail. This does not mean that if a pastor or church planter, living in a diverse neighborhood has a vision for an intercultural church and has no support they should throw in the towel. It will however be essential to discern how to include others so that they may

share the vision for such an articulation of the local church. In our church context, shared decision-making has always required more time but has also yielded more shared ownership leading to mission success. The intercultural church cannot be realized as one man's vision. Getting the right people on board will be crucial; the maturity and diversity of leaders gathered to help move the vision forward will be essential to the formation and success of the church.

ANTICIPATE GROWTH

While congregational studies have shown that homogenous churches may grow faster than diverse ones, a congregational study of over twenty thousand United Methodist congregations in the United States between 1990 and 2010 revealed that multiracial churches showed more numeric growth than homogenous ones during that same time frame.[384] This research challenges the prevailing perspective that if we pursue an intercultural church we will not grow numerically. In this research conducted within the United Methodist Congregations, two reasons were offered for this surprising trend. The first attributes such growth to the fact that multiracial churches may be attractive to a broader base of people explicitly because of their multiracial constituency. Second, is the relative scarcity of the multicultural congregational option.[385] Church leaders pursuing an intercultural approach to local church ministry may then be surprised that they grow faster than they may expect though this is not guaranteed. As Canada continues to grow racially diverse, the intercultural church can become a safe and empowering place for people to grow, find community and acceptance in an ever changing and racially

[384] Dougherty, Martí and Ferguson, "Racial Dynamics of Congregations and Communities," 1–2.

[385] Dougherty, Martí and Ferguson, "Racial Dynamics of Congregations and Communities," 24.

diverse world. Even so, those interested in the pursuit of an intercultural church ought to have the long view in mind and discern the significance of growing the character of a people united in a common purpose while valuing the unique cultures and gifts of all.

CONCLUSION

The argument throughout this paper has been that the intercultural church is not the primary mission for the church but a needed articulation of the church to fulfill God's mission at a time when racial polarization in Western society has intensified. To guard against making the means the end, the leaders of Skyview Church must keep the mission of making disciples as the primary task by indiscriminately reaching out and including people from all walks of life in the mission of God. While the Western Church has a history of subjugating racialized people, the changing racial landscape in North America presents us with the unique opportunity to rethink and re-learn what it may mean to reflect a biblical ecclesiology that is not only hospitable but embodies the Christian message of God's reconciling love for all people. In this sense, the intercultural church can embody the message of reconciliation through cross cultural relationships. These cross-cultural friendships do not only hold the potential to be transformative of individual lives but can become a means of witness to the reconciling power of the triune God in whose image all have been made: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn.13:35).

A Prophetic Word to the Church I Love

Finally, the review of the Church of the Nazarene on the USA/Canada region showed that despite a desire to incarnate the message and mission of Jesus, Nazarenes' have historically failed to stand against racial injustice and discrimination of African Americans and Indigenous people in the United States and Canada. It has been my intention throughout this project to honestly reflect on our past so that we may be able to discern a new way forward free from the attitudes and practices that have limited equality and just diversity within the church. Brueggemann explains that the work of the prophet is to energize hope in the people and to offer

a prophetic critique to systems of injustice.[386] It has been my desire to do both in search of an alternative theologically informed response to the problem of difference. Returning to our theological roots by reclaiming a holiness ethic that holds the promise of personal and social transformation in tension can empower Nazarenes to meet the growing racial diversity within our cities, towns, and rural communities with optimism and free from attitudes that have characterized racialized peoples as subordinate to others in God's kingdom. This will require leaders on all levels within the denomination to courageously challenge perspectives that perpetuate segregated church communities, 'white flight', and Eurocentric control. It will require local church pastors to prophetically call forth communities of Jesus followers who are willing to forsake their comfort, power, and privilege in pursuit of just and equal inclusion of racialized voices on all levels of leadership within the North American church. It will require courageous leadership despite the fear of loss or exclusion that threatens the prophetic voice from calling forth just and inclusive communities of faith. It is my sincere hope that the optimism of God's transforming grace, that once gripped the hearts of our founding Nazarene pioneers, may inspire a truly repentant church so that we may move forward together in unity and peace:

> But now you must get rid of all such things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, enslaved and free, but Christ is all and in all!" (Col. 3:8-11).

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[386] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

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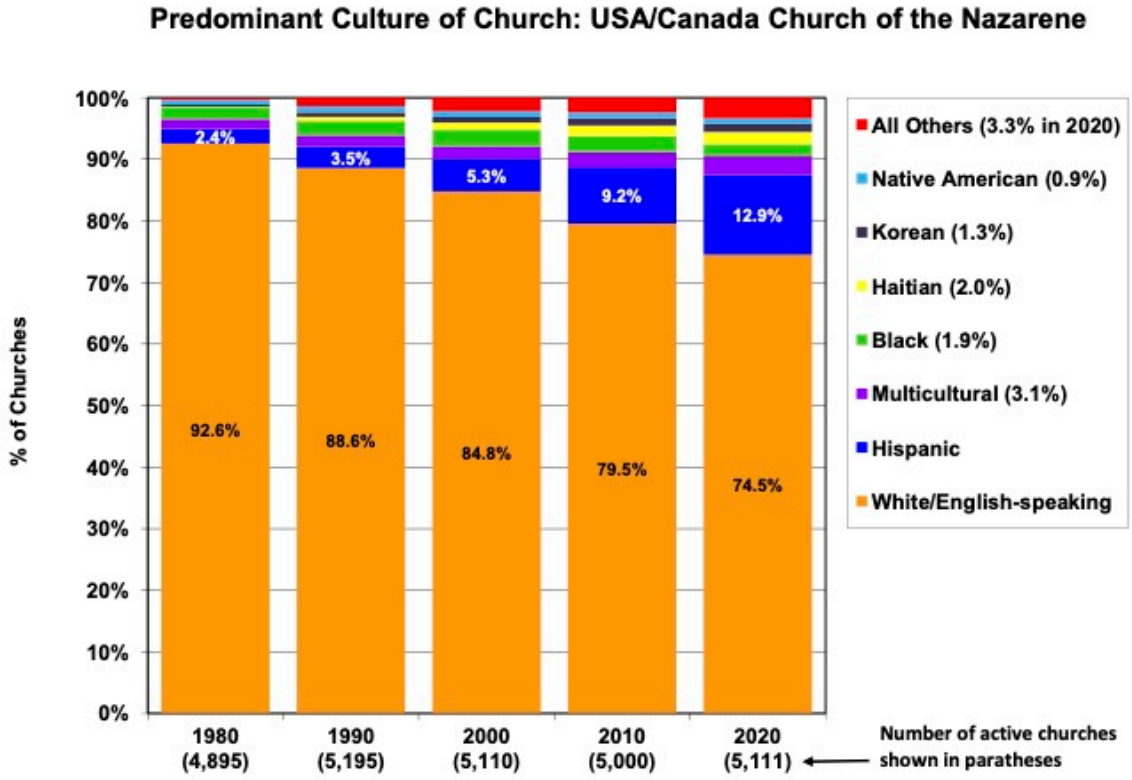
APPENDIX A



Research Services, Church of the Nazarene Global Ministry Center, March 2021

APPENDIX B

Ethnic Origin		
	Population[18]	% of Population
Total population in private households by ethnic origins	**51,385**	
North American Aboriginal origins	**1,420**	**2.8**
Other North American origins (e.g., Canadian, American, Acadian)	**10,185**	**19.8**
European origins	**25,120**	**48.9**
British Isles origins	15,205	29.6
French origins	3,875	7.5
Western European origins (except French origins)	8,570	16.7
German	6,970	13.6
Northern European origins (except British Isles origins)	3,115	6.1
Eastern European origins	6,070	11.8
Ukrainian	2,755	5.4
Southern European origins	3,315	6.5
Other European origins	270	0.5
Caribbean origins	**520**	**1.0**
Latin, Central and South American origins	**1,270**	**2.5**
African origins	**1,800**	**3.5**
Central and West African origins	770	1.5
North African origins	230	0.4
Southern and East African origins	550	1.1
Other African origins	345	0.7
Asian origins	**20,100**	**39.1**
West Central Asian and Middle Eastern origins	1,495	2.9
Lebanese	450	0.9
South Asian origins	5,465	10.6
East Indian	4,140	8.1
Pakistani	860	1.7
East and Southeast Asian origins	13,255	25.8
Chinese	8,735	17.0
Filipino	3,010	5.9
Vietnamese	1,275	2.5
Other Asian origins	105	0.2
Oceania origins	**185**	**0.4**

APPENDIX C

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Let us open our hearts and minds as we bring to you and our community our deepest needs and concerns….

In response to hearing Your Word [and with all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord for our world, our nation and our community. [pause]

Father….out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord.
Lord, hear our voices

We grieve for our world,

We pray for the people of Haiti. In the aftermath of the recent earthquake pray for those who are displaced and injured and without basic necessities. We pray for those who have lost loved ones. We pray for our churches who are providing shelter and sharing food and water and other basic necessities. We pray for resources to help our churches respond to the overwhelming needs and for security in getting resources to people in need.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

As the unrest continues in Afghanistan, our hearts ache for those who are in danger, those who are afraid, and those who are hurting. We pray for safety and peace.

We pray that the international community will open doors and welcome those fleeing danger, persecution and violence.

Remember the women and girls who face uncertainty and fear for what the future holds. Bring reassurance and comfort.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

COVID-19 continues to cause much concern for physical health, mental health and political division globally and we pray for those who do not have access to a vaccine or sufficient medical support. Bring the necessary vaccine supplies to those countries with limited or no supply.

Renew and bring strength to the nurses, doctors and medical staff that are exhausted.

As our own city prepares for a return to school and increase in in-person activities, give us the compassion and sensitivity to navigate our circumstances and those around us with grace and love. Let us put our trust in the One who gives us strength.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

A national and mayoral election are coming this Fall and we need Your guidance to bring forth the right candidate. We also pray specifically for our Alberta Premier Jason Kenney and Chief Medical Office Dr Deena Hinshaw…and Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi.

We pray for wisdom, confidence and reassurance in each of their responsibilities. Give them wisdom and grace as they lead us through the economic crisis, the unique provincial challenges coast to coast, and the continued response throughout the pandemic.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our surrounding neighborhoods of Country Hills, Country Hills Village, Coventry Hills, Harvest Hills and Panorama Hills. We ask that our physical presence be noticed, our actions and initiatives be welcomed, and the community association feel supported as we

seek to listen and learn about our community. Give us guidance as we reach out and build relationship with our neighbors in meaningful ways.

Comfort those who are emotionally and spiritually drained!

Reveal Your light to those in darkness!

Bring hope to those who are lost!

Strengthen those who have been knocked down!

Encourage those who are unsure!

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for Pastor Stuart, Ruthanne, Lauren, Luke and Alanna. We pray this vacation is a time of rest and renewal. A time for family fun and space from the daily pressures of work, school and ministry.

We pray for Pastor Britni, Fabian, Pastor Ryan and Makayla – may the feel the love of our community in these distant times, may they know they are valued and appreciated, may the know the peace of God in their ministry here in Calgary at Skyview. Comfort each of them as they are separated from their families. Encourage them in their purpose for being here at Skyview.

We pray for our church board and the ministry leaders who pour into making Skyview a place for all to worship. We give thanks for those who serve and pray you reenergize and provide for their needs.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of all creation, we ask you to protect those within our Skyview Community. May each of us support each other in prayer, love, encouragement, hospitality as we continue to be the church in our neighborhoods and in our congregation. You know our hearts and our burdens – we lay them before you today.

Amen!

APPENDIX D

MUTUAL INVITATION

(An exercise in cross cultural communication to be used in groups settings)[387]

The Process

Facilitator: To ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way: The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you are not ready to share yet, say "I pass for now" and we will invite [you to share later on]. If you don't want to say anything at all, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited. We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone's sharing immediately. There will be time to respond and to ask clarifying questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

Important to Keep in Mind

1. Because there will be participants with different perceptions of power, facilitation that exclusively uses the "volunteer style" of interaction that favors those from individualist cultures excludes those whose interactions favor a collectivistic culture. Therefore, the

[387] "Resources," Kaleidoscope Institute, accessed on December 28, 2022, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c3631609772ae2563852818/t/5d2780613d10f200016344d8/1562869859015/KI+Toolbox+-+English+PDF.pdf

Mutual Invitation process is used in order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak when the catalyst gives the instruction to do so.

2. As group members become more accustomed to using this tool, they make connections with everyone in the session, because they are required to invite each speaker by NAME. The person who is invited may or may not be someone from whom she/he ordinarily wants to hear. When Mutual Invitation is used, it encourages deep and holy listening to one another, because there are no interruptions or refutations allowed until everyone has spoken who wants to speak.
3. It is important to remember that in some cultural settings, group members will not speak up in a discussion unless they have been invited. The reasons for this may be gender, or age-related or other traditions embedded deeply in one's culture. There may be those who are uncomfortable singling a person out to share. For them it may feel like when they were a child and were being selected (or not selected) to play on a team. There are two safeguards built into the process that can assuage people's fears.
    a. One: each person invited has three options: share, pass for now (which means "I am not ready, please come back to me"), or pass (which means "I do not choose to share on this topic"). However, no matter which option is selected, the one invited has the privilege of inviting another person in the group by NAME.
    b. Two: Throughout the process, the invitation to speak passes back and forth, and no one is left out of the process.

Adapted from *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* by Eric H. F. Law, pages 113–114.