A THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE

MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH

MOVEMENT: 2000 - 2013

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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To Brooke and Lincoln,

with the hope that you will join your mom and dad

in the multi-ethnic, heavenly kingdom

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PREFACE

Research either tends to confirm or to challenge the beliefs of the student. The latter is what happened to me. The position I outline below aims to be biblical, but it is also biographical—for it documents the reasons my opinion on this topic has recently changed. Years ago I would have been quite surprised to learn that I would eventually go to great lengths to defend—of all things—the propriety of mono-ethnic churches.

But circumstances required me to place my theological presuppositions back under the microscope of Scripture, and this paper is the product of my re-examination of ethnicity and the local church. If the reflections that follow are right in the eyes of the Lord, I hope this project will benefit the church as it tries to make disciples of all nations. If these conclusions are incorrect, I hope they will be quickly forgotten.

I am indebted to so many who have directly or indirectly made this project possible. This dissertation may have never begun if a handful of African American friends in Louisville had not told me (a white guy) why they were uneasy attending my church. I thank them for their honesty, and I thank Immanuel Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and it elders for the love they have for all peoples. Immanuel was a welcoming environment where I could explore this topic at the theological and practical level.

Through countless conversations, friends, acquaintances, classmates, and professors have challenged (and hopefully refined) my thinking on this topic. With fear that I am overlooking several, I wish to thank Darrell Dow, Doug Thorpe, Aaron Ruszkiewicz, Pete Christianson, Lance Limanti, Tom Lynn, Jim Rairick, Adam Young, Andrew Wilkinson, Robbie Hopkins, John Randolph, Chris Clemans, Adam McCulloch, Bradley Cochran, Gus Suárez, Todd Robertson, Trent DeLoach, Curtis Woods, Drs. Gary

pages will burn, and all that will matter is not that a framed degree is hung on a wall, but that a framed man was hung on a cross. To know him is to have everything.

Rick Hardison

Georgetown, Kentucky

December 2014

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MULTI-ETHNIC MANDATE

In August 2003, white residents of Shreveport, Louisiana, had an opportunity to earn a little extra cash. Bishop Fred Caldwell, pastor of Green Acres Full Gospel Church, offered Caucasians in Shreveport $5 per hour to attend the otherwise mostly African American Sunday worship service. Caldwell also promised $10 per hour for attending the Thursday service, and he chose to pay all qualified visitors from his own pocket.[1]

Caldwell defended his unconventional approach: "Our churches are too segregated, and the Lord never intended for that to happen. It's time for something radical."[2] The experiment ran for one month and yielded about two dozen white visitors, joining the approximately 300 African Americans already in attendance. A year later the church had five to six new white members.[3] This effort embodies how concerned many Christians are about mono-ethnic churches, and the goal of this dissertation is to explore whether Scripture warrants such concern.

The predominately accepted benchmark for measuring ethnic diversity in the congregational setting is that no more than 80 percent of the church comes from the same

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[1]Ted Olson, "Fred Caldwell: Paying the Price for Unity," *Christianity Today,* August 1, 2004, accessed January 18, 2014, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/august/16.41.html.

[2]Quoted by Diane Haag, "La. Black church will pay whites to attend," *USA Today,* July 30, 2003, accessed January 18, 2014, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2003-07-30-church-usat_x.htm.

[3]Olson, "Fred Caldwell." I first learned of this story in Michael O. Emerson, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006), 9-10.

ethnic group.[4] Using this rubric, about 94.5 percent of Christian congregations in America are mono-ethnic.[5] This statistic means the vast majority of American worshippers sit next to someone ethnically similar to themselves on Sunday morning. Several pastors, theologians, Christian sociologists, and authors find the status quo unacceptable—even unbiblical.

Demographic trends suggest the "mono-ethnic problem" will be accentuated with time because America is getting more and more ethnically diverse. Statistics abound to show how minority populations are on the rise. America is on track to become a "majority-minority" nation by 2043.[6] Today America has more Jews than are in Israel and more blacks than any other country (except Nigeria); and America is the third largest Spanish-speaking country.[7] As of July 1, 2011, most children in America under one year old are minorities.[8]

But the significant demographic for local churches is not only that the overall population of America is diversifying, but that neighborhoods themselves are diversifying. Edward Glaeser and Jacob Vigdor chart the desegregation of American

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[4]Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 2.

[5]Ibid. If all religious congregations are considered (including non-Christian ones), 92.5 percent are mono-ethnic. According to a 2014 article by Mark DeYmaz, 14.4 percent of Protestant evangelical churches are now multi-ethnic, but DeYmaz does not give his source (Mark DeYmaz, "The Multi-Ethnic Church: A Historical Challenge," *The Christian Post*, February 17, 2014, accessed July 29, 2014, http://www.christianpost.com/news/the-multi-ethnic-church-a-historical-challenge-114703/).

[6]U. S. Census Bureau, "U.S. Census Bureau Projections Show a Slower Growing, Older, More Diverse Nation a Half Century from Now," December 12, 2012, accessed March 19, 2014, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html. Here "majority-minority" means that non-Hispanic whites are estimated to be the largest single population by ethnicity, but they will represent less than 50 percent of the entire U.S. population.

[7]David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 15.

[8]U. S. Census Bureau, "Most Children Younger Than Age 1 are Minorities, Census Bureau Reports," May 17, 2012, accessed January 29, 2014, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-90.html.

neighborhoods, and their findings indicate that churches are increasingly located in ethnically diverse environments.[9] Communities are diversifying not only because of immigration, gentrification and above-average minority birthrates,[10] but neighborhoods are desegregating in large part because ghettos are declining and African American suburbanization is rising. Of the 658 housing markets tracked by the Census Bureau, segregation is now lower than average segregation levels in 1970 in all but one housing market. Segregation also declined in 522 of the 658 housing markets between 2000 and 2010.[11] Hence, America is experiencing "the near eradication of the all-white neighborhood."[12]

Ethnically similar communities are becoming and will become increasingly diverse, and white neighborhoods will likely one day resemble ghost-towns of the Wild West. As this transition transpires, churches will face difficult choices. Will they grow to reflect the diversity of their new neighborhoods? Or will minority groups "hunker down" and become more inwardly focused, spawning more and more churches that reach primarily one ethnic group? What forms of outreach will churches use? Will reaching the nations in "our backyard" mean planting ethnic-specific mission churches or trying to incorporate immigrant populations into majority culture churches?

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[9]Edward Glaeser and Jacob Vigdor, "The End of the Segregated Century: Racial Separation in America's Neighborhoods, 1890-2010," *Civic Report* 66 (January 2012), accessed January 29, 2014, http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/cr_66.pdf.

[10]U. S. Census Bureau, "Births, Birth Rates and Fertility Rates by Race, Sex, and Age: 1980-2007," Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011, accessed January 29, 2014, http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0080.pdf. In 2007, whites averaged 13.7 births per thousand, blacks averaged 16.9 births per thousand, and Asian or Pacific Islanders averaged 17.2 births per thousand.

[11]Glaeser and Vigdor, "The End of the Segregated Century," 1. Analyzing census tracts reveals the same trend of desegregation. In 2000, there were 902 census tracts with zero black residents. Ten years later this number was down to 424 census tracts out of 72,531 total census tracts (ibid., 7).

[12]Ibid., 7

The Primary Question

Answers to these questions hinge on how one responds to the most central question of this dissertation: does Scripture call churches to try to be as ethnically diverse as their communities? Those who answer "yes" support the *multi-ethnic mandate*. Those who answer "not necessarily" support the *multi-ethnic option.* The multi-ethnic mandate is the belief that churches *must* strive to become as ethnically diverse as their surroundings. In this view, Scripture mandates multi-ethnicity. Mark DeYmaz, pastor of Mosaic Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, is probably the leading proponent of the multi-ethnic mandate at a popular level. The subtitle of one of his books reveals his belief that ethnic diversity at the local level is required: *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation*.[13] DeYmaz declares, "And let me make one thing perfectly clear from the start: pursuit of the multi-ethnic local church is, in my view, not optional. It is biblically mandated for all who would aspire to lead local congregations of faith."[14] He clarifies that the pursuit of a multi-ethnic church should not be done because neighborhoods are getting more diverse or because it is "cool or politically correct." Instead, "we must embrace the vision because it is 'spiritually correct'."[15]

Therefore, the multi-ethnic mandate considers Korean churches, white churches, Hispanic churches, and African American churches to be sad capitulations to man's consumeristic tendencies. These divisions perpetuate the often lamented mantra that Sunday morning at 11:00 is the most segregated hour of the week. Thus, when faced with the question "What should an ethnically homogeneous church do in the face of an ethnically diverse community," the biblical answer—according to those who embrace the

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[13]Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

[14]Ibid., xxix.

[15]Ibid., 120.

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multi-ethnic mandate—is always to integrate various peoples into the same congregation. A church in a multi-ethnic environment that remains mono-ethnic has not applied Scripture properly. Thus, if the multi-ethnic mandate is biblically sound, the command to pursue multi-ethnicity is incumbent on all congregations.[16]

Those who embrace the *multi-ethnic option* answer the primary question differently. The multi-ethnic option recognizes the benefits of multi-ethnic churches. It recognizes that multi-ethnic churches are desirable and biblically permissible. The proponents of the multi-ethnic option, however, do not believe Scripture calls *all* churches to be ethnically diverse. Gary McIntosh and Alan McMahan favor the multi-ethnic option in their work *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community*. They explain,

> We are not unabashed multi-ethnic church proponents, but we do believe churches must move toward greater inclusiveness and cultural sensitivity in our day. But we also believe that mono-ethnic churches are biblical and needed too. From our perspective, it will take all kinds of churches—mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic—to reach all the nations for Christ.[17]

From this perspective, faithful gospel proclamation in a multi-ethnic community may produce a multi-ethnic church, or it may produce a conglomeration of mono-ethnic churches. If the latter occurs, the status quo should not be mourned but embraced as a God-glorifying option that allows Christianity to thrive in various contexts.

These terms (multi-ethnic mandate and multi-ethnic option) are critical to this dissertation, but they are not common in the relevant literature. I am introducing these terms to help sharpen the difference between the two approaches. A benefit of these

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[16]Above I have cited DeYmaz because he is one of the most vocal proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate, but the proponents of this position are numerous. It is vital to this research that readers understand that defenders of the multi-ethnic mandate are not simply saying that multi-ethnicity is the direction they are leading their congregation. Nor are they simply saying that multi-ethnic churches have a lot of benefits. More than that, they are claiming that the Bible calls all churches in a multi-ethnic community to be multi-ethnic. For more examples, see appendix 1, "Examples of the Multi-Ethnic Mandate."

[17]Gary McIntosh and Alan McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-ethnic Community: Why It Matters and How It Works* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2012), 21.

terms is to show that both sides in this debate have a positive view of multi-ethnic churches. It skews the conversation in a negative direction if readers think that the two sides in this conversation are those who are "for" and "against" multi-ethnic churches.[18]

Ethnic diversity is not just a concern at the congregational level, but also at the denominational level. Despite having a rich history of planting non-English speaking churches, Ed Stetzer has shown that Southern Baptist church memberships have not matched the rising immigrant population in the United States. In the 1980s and early 90s, the percentage of non-whites and non-blacks in America compared similarly to the same demographic in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). But over the last two decades, SBC churches have not kept up with rising immigrant populations. In 2008, less than 2 percent of Southern Baptists were neither black nor white, while 10 percent of the U.S. population was from the same group. While non-English speakers form the highest baptism rates in the SBC, the denomination is still underrepresented by them.[19] Considering the rise in minority populations in America, R. Albert Mohler concludes that the SBC "will be either more *diverse* or more *diminished*."[20] The denomination will

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[18]I have divided the multi-ethnic church movement into these two camps (mandate vs. option) in order to crystallize the debate, but there are technically two other positions. Another position can be called the "multi-ethnic preference." Appendix 1 offers examples of those who seem to fall somewhere between the multi-ethnic mandate and the multi-ethnic option. These theologians and practitioners do not claim to have found a mandate in Scripture that applies to all churches, but they do have a strong preference for multi-ethnic churches. The other position could be called the "mono-ethnic mandate." This option is purely theoretical, for few, if any, church leaders attempt to argue that Scripture encourages ethnic segregation in all situations. Throughout my research in this topic, I have never come across a contemporary author that thinks churches *ought* to be mono-ethnic or that ethnic diversity in the church is bad. Thus, the most helpful way to frame the primary options regarding ethnicity in the local church is to compare the multi-ethnic mandate to the multi-ethnic option, while realizing that these two positions represent two poles of the movement, and some involved in this conversation find themselves at different points on the continuum.

[19]Ed Stetzer, "SBC Decline and Demographic Change," in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time,* ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 15-18.

[20]R. Albert Mohler, "The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention," in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time,* eds. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 94, italics original.

either devote tremendous energy toward becoming more ethnically diverse, or it will eventually die.

Interestingly, those passionate about ethnic diversity at the denominational level can employ the multi-ethnic option or the multi-ethnic mandate. Individual churches becoming multi-ethnic or a collection of mono-ethnic churches in the same denomination both serve to increase the ethnic diversity of the denomination. For this reason, the argument that follows will interact mainly with ethnic diversity at the local church level, not the denominational level. But first a survey of the benefits and challenges of multi-ethnic churches will showcase what is at stake in the debate between the multi-ethnic mandate and the multi-ethnic option.

Benefits of Multi-Ethnic Churches

Listing all the advantages of multi-ethnic churches is impossible, but a brief survey of some of their benefits will reveal why many Christians desire to see more of them. Multi-ethnic churches tend to fit in well with a society that is becoming increasingly diverse. Public spaces such as parks, pools and schools have successfully integrated, but the church lags behind.[21] Likewise, Byrd laments, "While other institutions have been moved, often gradually and often by force of federal and state courts, to achieve institutional integration, the Church of Jesus Christ still remains the last holdout in society on the frontier of intentional inclusion and unity."[22] Multi-ethnic churches, then, are symbols of equality among all peoples.

Multi-ethnic churches can reach many types of people. One proponent of multi-ethnic churches boasts, "Your [multi-ethnic] church becomes a safe haven for lots

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[21]Trillia J. Newbell, *United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 15.

[22]Terriel R. Byrd, *I Shall Not Be Moved: Racial Separation in Christian Worship* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 19.

of different people."[23] Naturally, a Somali will probably feel more at home in a multi-ethnic church than an all-white congregation. This fact equips members of multi-ethnic churches to connect their church life to their personal evangelism. If a believer of one ethnicity leads someone of another ethnicity to Christ, the new believer does not have to find a church that matches his background. Instead, the diversity of the multi-ethnic church will help the new believer feel at home.

Similar to the previous point, multi-ethnic churches are uniquely appealing to certain groups of people. Yancey points out that the arts community and college students are two subcultures that are uniquely diverse. Those who identify with these subcultures might feel uncomfortable in a mono-ethnic environment because they have become accustomed to a multi-ethnic setting. Those who marry someone from a different ethnic group will also find a unique measure of comfort in a multi-ethnic church. Edwards has found that those who were raised in multi-ethnic settings are more at ease in multi-ethnic churches.[24] Some black people go to multi-ethnic churches because they do not like the traditional black church experience.[25] These examples show that the same factor that often draws many to mono-ethnic churches—comfort—also draws others to multi-ethnic churches.

Members of multi-ethnic churches also become more cross-culturally competent. Many Christians live and work in a multi-ethnic environment, so a multi-ethnic church assists Christians in interacting more efficiently in their own world. They produce members with good intercultural skills.

[23]Jemar Tisby, "The Joyful Pursuit of Multi-ethnic Churches," *The Gospel Coalition Blog*, November 13, 2012, accessed August 24, 2013, http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/11/13/the-joyful-pursuit-of-multi-ethnic-churches/.

[24]Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial* Churches (New York: Oxford, 2008), 101. According to Edwards, African Americans who spent time with whites during their childhood were more likely to go to a multi-ethnic church.

[25]Ibid., 112-14.

Multi-ethnic churches benefit from a broad range of cultural insights. John Piper makes this point when he proposed to his congregation his desire to bring a non-white pastor on staff at his church. Even if hiring a minority would decrease the efficiency of the organization, Piper submits that this would be an acceptable cost in light of God's vision of racial equality.[26] Someone with a different ethnic worldview may be able to isolate a problem and formulate a solution better than someone from the majority culture. Different cultures often have unique insights into how to interpret Scripture and improve church life. If more cultures are present, more insights are available. An increased knowledge of other cultures also helps believers decipher between what is primary and what is secondary regarding matters of worship.[27]

Multi-ethnic churches, and particularly the theologians that promote them, confront bad theology related to ethnicity. The multi-ethnic church movement has repeatedly highlighted the faulty (and often racist) exegesis that interpreted the "mark" of Cain in Genesis 4 to be the curse of black skin.[28] It also has debunked the once-promoted view that the "curse of Ham" in Genesis 9 was black skin.[29]

Multi-ethnic churches do not need to work as hard to maintain a heart for the nations because the nations are in their midst.[30] Accordingly, they are forced to consider how to respond biblically, lovingly, and lawfully to illegal immigrants in the church.[31]

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[26]John Piper, *Bloodlines*: *Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 257-58.

[27]Tisby, "The Joyful Pursuit of Multi-ethnic Churches."

[28]See Kenneth A. Mathews and M. Sydney Park, *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 54-55.

[29]See J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003), 51-56; Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 60-63; A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God: How Revelation and Redemption Lead to Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 99-102; Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 67-68.

[30]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 23.

[31]"What Should Churches Do About Illegal Immigrants in their Midst? Meeting the

They also act as a hedge against racism. Yancey argues that racial

reconciliation cannot happen without significant relationships being built across ethnic

lines, and multi-ethnic churches are essential avenues for these relationships. Yancey

observes,

> It is easy for Christians who attend segregated churches to avoid talking with each
> other about the tough issues of race and racism. Since the natural organization of
> American society discourages primary interracial relationships, Christians have to
> take extraordinary steps to create multiracial churches.[32]

DeYmaz also argues that the gospel will not seem credible when coming from a mono-

ethnic church.[33] Priest and Priest caution, "Racially homogeneous congregations are a

weak base from which to try to address the problems of our racialized society."[34] It is

harder for critics of the church to accuse a multi-ethnic church of racism, and they offer

majority-culture believers the opportunity to care for foreigners (Lev 19:33-34). In doing

so, they are often caring for "the least of these my brothers" (Matt 25:40).

Challenges of Multi-Ethnic Churches

While they offer many unique benefits, multi-ethnic churches also present

many challenges. Proponents of such congregations are quick to admit what some of

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Sojourner," *Christianity Today*, February 2011, 52-53. This article provides three perspectives on this question written by Mark DeYmaz, M. Daniel Carroll R., and Matthew Soerens.

[32]George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 45. Yancey and his co-authors expound on this point in *United by Faith*. It is important to recognize that some in the multi-ethnic church movement see the church as one part of the solution to the heal racism in America. Here, multi-ethnic churches are pursued not necessarily because Scripture commands them but because they are useful in overcoming ethnic tension (see Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 21). According to this perspective, even if Scripture did not call for multi-ethnic churches, supporters may still call for them—the same way they may also advocate for multi-ethnic schools, little league teams, etc.

[33]Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 37.

[34]Kersten Bayt Priest and Robert J. Priest, "Divergent Worship Practices in the Sunday Morning Hour: Analysis of an 'Interracial' Church Merger Attempt," in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, ed. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (New York: Oxford, 2007), 290.

them are.[35] They are "hard work."[36] Noel Castellanos confesses that a "multicultural fellowship is a lot harder to achieve than anybody can ever imagine."[37] Woo recognizes that they require cost and sacrifice, so much that he actually encourages prospective members to join his church only if they sense a call from God to be a part of this kind of fellowship. A Christian needs to be mature to join a multi-ethnic church.[38] He even themed 2002 "The Year of Discomfort" because this is when "God brought to light the necessity of experiencing suffering and hardship if we were going to move to the next dimension of becoming a fully integrated multiracial congregation."[39]

The cultural differences between ethnicities accentuate challenges related to relationships and corporate worship. Ware acknowledges that "harmonious relationships between people of different ethnic origins is [*sic*] difficult to attain. Dreams of loving multiethnic ministries often become competitive, contentious, confrontational nightmares that end in deeper divisions."[40] Kersten Bayt Priest and Robert J. Priest studied two homogeneous churches (one Anglo, one African American) that tried to merge, but the

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[35]The purpose of this section is to overview the main challenges that multi-ethnic church leaders acknowledge having. Some of my own analysis of the multi-ethnic mandate will reveal additional challenges that are not mentioned here. Chap. 4 will list several benefits of mono-ethnic churches: they help preserve culture, they enable believers to retain their identity as a member of an ethnic group while still being in Christ, they benefit from high levels of contextualization, and they take advantage of the natural bridges of the gospel. One drawback of multi-ethnic churches is that they do not have these advantages. Chap. 5 will also list some potential dangers of the multi-ethnic mandate.

[36]Yancey, One Body, One Spirit, 18.

[37]Noel Castellanos, quoted in Edward Gilbreath and Mark Galli, "Harder than Anyone Can Imagine: Four Working Pastors—Latino, Asian, Black and White—Respond to the Bracing Thesis of *United by Faith.* A CT forum with Noel Castellanos, Bill Hybels, Soong-Chan Rah, Frank Reid," *Christianity Today*, April 2005, accessed May 6, 2011, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/ april/23.36.html. This is a published interview where four proponents of multi-ethnic churches are responding to the same questions.

[38]Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 50.

[39]Ibid., 47.

[40]Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, 86.

effort ended up failing because of cultural clashes.[41] For instance, the Caucasian group

struggled to learn how to sway with the choir, and the African Americans were

uncomfortable hearing white believers call the pastor by his first name. They conclude,

"Even if people can understand the practices of others, and desire to embrace them, some

practices are difficult for fully formed adults to learn."[42] This example confirms that

having a heart for other ethnicities is different from being able to adjust to their cultural

preferences.

Another challenge is that all "normal" church problems have the potential to be

infused with racial tension. DeYmaz explains how conflict can arise so easily in a multi-

ethnic church:

> Two examples illustrate the unique challenges any time race and class are part
> of the equation: When an Executive Pastor admonishes a Youth Pastor to step up his
> game, both being white in an otherwise all-white church, the young man or woman
> may walk away challenged, discouraged, or even frustrated, but he or she will not
> wonder if race had something to do with it. In a multi-ethnic church, when an
> upwardly mobile African American member of your staff informs working class
> Hispanic members that they cannot set up tables in a specific area of the church for
> a Quinceañera celebration, you will not only have to navigate the natural human
> frustrations but subtle racial or social ones as well.[43]

Yancey conducted a survey of different attributes of multi-ethnic churches, and

he found that they reported a slightly higher degree of conflict than their mono-ethnic

counterparts.[44] Not only do multi-ethnic churches seem to experience more conflict, but

once a conflict starts, ethnic diversity accentuates the problem all the more because

different cultures often have different approaches to problem solving. Branson and

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[41]Priest and Priest, "Divergent Worship Practices in the Sunday Morning Hour," 275-91.
Supporting this example, Yancey states that the hardest multi-ethnic church to create is one comprised
mainly of African Americans and Anglos (Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit*, 157-59).

[42]Ibid., 286.

[43]Mark DeYmaz, quoted in David Swanson, "The Theology of Multi-Ethnic Church," *Parse*,
June 18, 2010, accessed July 17, 2014, http://www.christianitytoday.com/parse/2010/june/theology-of-
multi-ethnic-church.html.

[44]Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit*, 37.

Martínez illustrate how these differences manifest themselves in multi-ethnic churches:

> The moment a problem arises, many people from the U.S. dominant culture want to find the cause and fix it. Others are immediately concerned about relationship and about power differentials in the situation. For others, the concern is maintaining the community and saving face. It is not that some people want to address the problem and others want to avoid it.[45]

In light of many of these challenges, one multi-ethnic church pastor concludes that leaders in these settings need to be both pastors and cultural anthropologists.[46]

Still another difficulty multi-ethnic churches face is that bringing various ethnicities into a congregation often means a church has visitors and new members from a variety of religious and denominational traditions. Such a spectrum can bring much theological diversity, and churches can struggle to balance their hope for ethnic inclusion with their desire for theological purity.[47]

While multi-ethnic churches make relationships, corporate worship and conflict resolution harder, these difficulties are not endured equally by all. One study sought to apply social theory of group interactions to a particular multi-ethnic congregation. The working hypothesis at the outset of the study was that the minority populations would face more difficulty in the church than those in the majority, and in-depth interviews with current and former members confirmed the theory. The greatest

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[45]Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 181. They offer the following example to illustrate this dynamic in church life: "Bob, an elderly African American, was chairing the deacons' meeting in a biracial Baptist church. Camille, an African American deacon, told the group that the husband and father of an African American church family had lost his job in a company downsizing, and after several months he was still looking for work. Camille knew that the family was facing stress for a daughter's college tuition at the city college. Ann, who was Euro-American, started listing a number of potential resources for the family's rent, utilities and tuition. She offered to e-mail a list to the parents. John, a Euro-American deacon, said he would be glad to go to the family that night and provide a personal check for the tuition expenses. Camille became silent, and Bob cleared his throat, displaying some discomfort. Bob then said that he appreciated these offers and said he would get back to them" (ibid., 181-82).

[46]Soong-Chan Rah, quoted in Gilbreath and Galli, "Harder than Anyone Can Imagine."

[47]See DeYmaz, "The Theology of Multi-Ethnic Church," for examples of theological challenges he has experienced as a result of ministering to a heterogeneous group.

areas for conflict related to worship style and relational strain. Members of the non-majority culture struggled feeling a sense of belonging in the church and had a harder time developing close friendships. They cited the diversity of the church as a factor that led to difficulty; majority members did not feel that the ethnic diversity of the church created much difficulty. Emerson and Christerson conclude, "From the interview data, it appears that the costs of diversity in this congregation are born disproportionately by non-majority members."[48]

Thesis

The main argument of this dissertation will be that the multi-ethnic mandate is not found in Scripture. That is, the Bible contains no particular command, theological reason or normative pattern that calls churches to strive to become as ethnically diverse as their communities. Therefore, there is room for—even strategic value in—mono-ethnic churches in the kingdom of God.

A compelling case can be made for the multi-ethnic mandate, however. In brief, here is a synthesis of the multi-ethnic mandate as presented by its proponents: Ethnic division is associated with the sin of Babel, yet Pentecost reverses the divisive effects of Babel. The OT instructs Israel to welcome foreigners (Exod 22:21), and hospitality toward outsiders is a theme in the NT (Luke 10:25-37; 3 John 5-8). When Christ came as the Messiah for the Jews, he ministered across ethnic lines. His house will be a place of prayer "for all nations" (Mark 11:17), and his gospel is now for all nations (Matt 28:20). Jesus also prayed that the church would be unified, which is a powerful witness to the watching world that Jesus was sent from the Father (John 17:21-23; cf. 13:34-35). Paul repeatedly affirms that Jews and Gentiles form "one new man" in

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[48]Brad Chisterson and Michael Emerson, "The Costs of Diversity in Religious Organizations: An In-Depth Case Study," *Sociology of Religion* 64, no. 2 (2003): 174-75. They suggest that the same factors that cause most volunteer organization to be mono-ethnic—easier to make friends, etc.—also create high costs for minorities in multi-ethnic churches (ibid., 161).

Christ because the "dividing wall of hostility" has been abolished through the cross (Eph 2:11-22), and the "mystery" of the gospel has now been revealed in Christ (Eph 3:1-6). Jew/Gentile equality is also seen in the fact they are baptized by the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:14). Hence, the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles are gone; they are now one (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). As a result, the NT shows the importance of Jews and Gentiles experiencing table fellowship, overcoming their cultural differences. When Peter allowed the church in Galatia to move in a homogeneous direction, Paul rebuked him for denying the "gospel" (Gal 2:11-14).

In addition, Paul's sending church in Antioch displays multi-ethnic leadership (Acts 13:1-2). The church at Jerusalem even created seven new leadership positions to overcome a rift in the church that could be traced back to ethnic differences. The churches in Rome, Corinth and Ephesus were also multi-ethnic. Finally, John's description of the heavenly assembly is certainly multi-ethnic, for the innumerable crowd surrounding Christ's throne was "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev 7:9), and the heartbeat of every Christian should be that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). Hence, those who favor the multi-ethnic mandate poignantly ask, "If the kingdom of heaven is not segregated, then why on earth is your local church?"[49]

This exegetical evidence is impressive and has persuaded many. These arguments are drawn from theology proper, Christology, anthropology, pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology. Below I will condense these different texts and reasons into seven primary theological arguments for the multi-ethnic mandate: the Babel/Pentecost argument, the hospitality argument, the argument based on Christ's

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[49]This rhetorical question is found in the introduction to each of Mark DeYmaz's thirty-six podcasts on "The Multiethnic Church." For example, see the introduction to DeYmaz's interview with multi-ethnic church proponent Efrem Smith, originally released November 3, 2011, accessed January 28, 2014, https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-multiethnic-church/id413558709.

ministry, the unity argument, the Jew/Gentile argument, the heaven argument, and the argument based on NT examples. Taken together, these arguments coalesce to prove (seemingly) a straightforward point: for a church to remain mono-ethnic in a multi-ethnic community reflects a misunderstanding of God's plan and a failure to achieve proper church health.

My task here is to re-examine the biblical data to see if these arguments actually lead to the multi-ethnic mandate. In other words, do these verses, examples and principles require churches to be multi-ethnic? This question raises several more salient considerations. What is the relationship between the local church and the universal church, and which is in view in a particular passage? To what extent do first-century Jew/Gentile relations correspond to ethnic distinctions in the United States today? How does the NT concern for table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles influence this debate? When the NT presents a church as multi-ethnic, should the interpreter treat this picture as descriptive or prescriptive? How is the atonement related to racial reconciliation? This dissertation will attempt to answer these questions in the forthcoming chapters.

The thesis to be argued is simple: Scripture does not command churches to be multi-ethnic. Such a verdict does not turn a blind-eye to the seven arguments mentioned above. Instead, upon closer examination the relevant biblical passages do not support the multi-ethnic conclusion often imposed on the texts. Yes, Babel and Pentecost may be related, but Pentecost should lead Christians to contextualize the gospel more, not less. Yes, Scripture commands believers to show hospitality to the foreigner, but hospitality can take on many forms. Yes, Jesus said it would be a powerful, evangelistic witness when Christians love one another, but such love does not have to be across ethnic lines to be meaningful. Yes, Scripture teaches the oneness of the church, but such unity is often expressed beyond the congregational level. Yes, Jews and Gentiles are now one in

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Christ, but this new reality is primarily the result of a covenantal shift happening in redemption history—not the result of the need to achieve ethnic diversity in the local church. Yes, the atonement destroyed the wall of hostility that separated Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-21), but Paul's "wall" is neither racism nor a homogeneous worship environment—but the Mosaic Law. Yes, heaven is multi-ethnic, but we are not in heaven yet. Yes, the church at Antioch was probably multi-ethnic, but their diverse leadership was the necessary by-product of first generation missionary activity in the area.

In short, the multi-ethnic mandate is a *non-sequitur*. The confidence many authors have in the need for ethnic diversity at the congregational level does not necessarily flow from the biblical evidence they provide. Scripture, therefore, does not frown upon mono-ethnic churches as if they are somehow less healthy than their cosmopolitan counterparts. Churches may be mono-ethnic if that is the natural byproduct of their righteous, contextualized ministries. Such is the position this dissertation will try to defend.

Finally, a word needs to be said about why this project matters. No small number of congregations is being indicted by the multi-ethnic mandate. More than nine out of ten churches are mono-ethnic.[50] But over 80 percent of Americans live in urban areas, which tend to be the centers of ethnic diversity.[51] Therefore, if the multi-ethnic mandate is correct, the majority of churches in America have missed God's will. The authors who defend it find most churches in America out of order to some extent. This is

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[50]A portion of these churches are ethnically similar simply because their communities are ethnically similar. Of the 3,143 counties in America, 1,205 have minority populations less than 10 percent. Most of these counties are in Appalachia, the upper Northeast, and central and upper Midwest, which have low total populations (Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones, and Roberto R. Ramirez, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010," U.S. Census Briefs, March 2011, accessed January 26, 2014, http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf).

[51]Here an urban area is defined as an area with 50,000 or more residents (U.S. Census Bureau, "2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria," accessed January 26, 2014, http://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html.)

a major criticism. Hence, this study is sorely needed to defend the ethnically similar

make-up of thousands of churches that are regularly being called unbiblical.

Another need for this dissertation is to legitimize certain forms of church

planting. If the thesis stated above can be defended, then ethnic-specific church planting

is an acceptable strategy to reach various people groups. The North American Mission

Board of the SBC has adopted this strategy:

> Since NAMB's formation in 1997, the entity has led Southern Baptists to place an emphasis on ethnic church planting. More than half of all SBC churches planted or affiliated with the SBC since 1997 have been African-American or ethnic.
> "NAMB will not take a step back from ethnic church planting," Ezell said. "At the same time, we are asking our ethnic churches to take a step up in supporting the Cooperative Program and our missions offerings."[52]

Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate avoid such "unbiblical methodologies of church

planting."[53] Such an approach is inherently misguided for those who see the multi-ethnic

mandate in Scripture. Ethnically contextualized churches may grow faster than others,

but this reality does not warrant their existence, they argue. So one intended outcome of

this investigation is to preserve ethnic-specific church planting as a biblically permissible

option.

A final reason this dissertation is needed is because there are at least three gaps

in the literature on this subject. The first gap relates to a systematic theology for multi-

ethnic churches. David Stevens, a strong proponent of the multi-ethnic mandate, claims

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[52]Mike Ebert, "Role to Focus on Increased Ethnic Involvement in SBC," August 8, 2011, accessed July 18, 2014, http://www.namb.net/nambblog1.aspx?id=8590117418&blogid=8589939695. Perhaps a more helpful way of discussing such churches is to call them "ethnic-specific" or "minority churches." Referring to "ethnic churches" may cause some members of the majority culture to overlook the fact that their culture is influencing their worship practices too.
     State level Southern Baptist agencies also are trying to plant ethnic-specific churches: "The Intercultural Church Planting & Missions Ministries Department strives to assist Georgia Baptist Convention churches, individuals, and associations in starting ethnic congregations and ministries to reach language/culture people, the functionally illiterate, the hearing impaired and the blind" (Georgia Baptist Convention, "Intercultural Church Planting & Missions Ministries," accessed July 18, 2014, http://gabaptist.org/intercultural-church-planting-and-missions-ministries/).

[53]Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, 132. "The wide-spread practice, and success, of planting homogeneous churches is more a reflection of racism than one of obedience to the Christ of reconciliation" (ibid., 132-33).

that few works are devoted to establishing the multi-ethnic mandate in Scripture.[54] My

research shows otherwise. Plenty of resources try to connect the dots between Scripture

and ethnic diversity in the church. Few resources, however, attempt to collect and

summarize all the major arguments for the multi-ethnic mandate *in one place*—with a

few exceptions.[55] Chapter 2 seeks to fill this gap.

A second gap exists within the church growth community. Some, such as

Dirke D. Johnson, affirm the need for mono-ethnic churches. Johnson rightly cautions

the multi-ethnic church movement: "Churches that desire a multicultural environment

must be careful not to drive an artificial form of measurement that is not found in the

Scriptures. . . . An undue focus on trying to be diverse or homogeneous is misplaced."[56]

While Johnson challenges the multi-ethnic church movement not to make Scripture say

more than it does, he does not deal with the particular passages of Scripture that are used

in support of the multi-ethnic mandate. Johnson successfully shows, both through

qualitative and quantitative analysis, that many black Christians *want* to be in a black

church, but his argument ends up resting more on sociological observation than on

theological critique. This methodology, which prioritizes what Christians *want* in a

worship service, is part of the problem, according to those in favor of the multi-ethnic

mandate. Therefore, a theologically-driven defense is needed to bolster the claims of the

church growth movement that sees ethnically similar churches as permissible options.

The final gap in the literature is the most significant. The vast majority of

contributors to this debate side with the multi-ethnic mandate. Very few authors who

have recently written about ethnicity and church relations agree with the thesis of this

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[54]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 6.

[55]See Stevens, *God's New Humanity*; Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*; and Bruce Milne, *Dynamic Diversity: Bridging Class, Age, Race and Gender in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007) for biblical theologies of the multi-ethnic mandate.

[56]Dirke D. Johnson, "Multicultural and Racial Reconciliation Efforts Fail to Attract Many in the Black Church," *Great Commission Research Journal* 2, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 223-24.

project. There are several attempts to demonstrate the multi-ethnic mandate, but I have not found many resources that offer a theological defense of why churches can remain mono-ethnic. The notable exception is Gary McIntosh and Alan McMahan's *Being the Church in a Multi-ethnic Community*. McIntosh and McMahan argue multi-ethnic churches and mono-ethnic churches can both be effective, but their book is more of a holistic response to the entire multi-ethnic church movement, and only a small portion of the work is devoted to responding to the theological side of the multi-ethnic mandate. I will agree with McIntosh and McMahan's critique of the multi-ethnic mandate, but I will also try to improve on their argument in specific places.

Despite McIntosh and McMahan's work, there is still a dearth of recently published literature that tries to defend the multi-ethnic option in contrast to the multi-ethnic mandate. Nearly everyone writing on Christianity and ethnic relations argues that Scripture calls for more and more ethnic integration. The result of this lopsided literature is that the practitioners who are planting mono-ethnic churches do not have many theologies defending their highly contextualized form of outreach. Meanwhile, proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate are decrying these mono-ethnic churches as unhealthy and unbiblical. Therefore, if the thesis defended below is—in fact—accurate, then this dissertation could fill a significant void in church growth literature.

Definitions

Several terms deserve special attention at this point: ethnicity, multi-ethnic, mono-ethnic, segregation, and racial reconciliation.

Ethnicity

Those who defend the multi-ethnic mandate have a far greater need to define "ethnicity" than is needed in this dissertation. If theologians are going to argue that a church has to be multi-ethnic, it is incumbent upon them to clarify how to know if a

church is multi-ethnic, which requires a workable definition. The thesis defended here

argues churches can be multi-ethnic, but they do not have to be, which makes a firm

definition less important. Nevertheless, a few clarifications about ethnicity may help

avoid confusion.

For the purposes of this project, an ethnicity is *a social construct that binds a*

particular group of people together through common affinities that may include shared

physical characteristics, place of origin, history, language, or culture.[57] This definition

contains at least three features that need further explanation.

First, ethnicity includes physical characteristics. Factors such as skin tone,

facial features, and hair texture help determine one's ethnicity—but this point is disputed.

Not everyone regards physical characteristics as determining factors in one's ethnicity.

John E. Farley understands an ethnic group to be "defined as a group of people who are

generally recognized by themselves or by others as a distinct group, *based entirely on*

social or cultural characteristics."[58] In his dichotomy, one's *race* is determined by

physical characteristics and one's *ethnicity* is defined by traits learned throughout life.

Therefore, one's physical appearance does not necessarily impact the ethnicity to which

one belongs. Likewise, Sandra Gindro reviews how this term has been historically

defined, and she suggests ethnicities are "groups which share certain economic, social,

cultural and religious characteristics at a given moment in time."[59] Physical

characteristics are noticeably absent from her definition.

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[57]One problem with the term *ethnicity* is that it sometimes fails to grasp the practical factors that make one person's behaviors and thoughts different from those of another person. A high degree of assimilation can mean that a third-generation Italian is not practically different from most of her Anglo counterparts, but she may still identify herself as Italian. "Culture" gets at the heart of what separates people, so I will sometimes use *culture* and *ethnicity* interchangeably.

[58]John E. Farley, *Majority-Minority Relations,* 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2005), 7, italics added.

[59]Sandro Gindro, "Ethnicity," in *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity & Culture*, ed. Guido Bolaffi et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 95.

Against Farley and Gindro, I maintain that physical attributes are relevant in defining a person's ethnicity. The reason for allowing appearance to help define an ethnic boundary is that there is often considerable overlap between certain physical characteristics and other factors (place origin, history, language and customs). Some physical characteristics become boundary markers that contribute toward an individual's self-identity. Accordingly, the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* defines ethnicity as a "classification of a person or persons into a particular group based on factors such as *physical characteristics (e.g. skin color, facial characteristics, body shape);* cultural identity (e.g. language or dialect, religion), or geographic origin."[60] Therefore, the difference between race and ethnicity cannot be neatly divided based on nature versus nurture categories, respectively. Allowing physical traits to be part of the definition of ethnicity is the most practical way to use the term.

Second, ethnicity is a social construct. Ethnic distinctions are socially defined, meaning they actually only exist in the mind of observers who project meaning onto certain characteristics and not others. For instance, societies tend to group people according to their skin tone but not according to their height. There is no "tall person" ethnic group. Hair texture also seems to matter more than hair color. Diet can help distinguish one ethnic group from another, but a vegetarian within a group is almost never considered to be a part of a separate ethnic group. Ethnic categories are real, but they are real because society has decided (perhaps arbitrarily) which factors create these categories. Thus, the notion of ethnicity lives in the mind of observers as they respond to their social surroundings. As people from one group interact with people from another group, this interaction forges an us/them mentality that becomes known as ethnicity.[61]

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[60]Donald R. Jacobs, "Ethnicity," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 323, italics mine.

[61]This paragraph is adapted from Farley's discussion of race as a social construct. But because he limits physical characteristics to race, I am applying his conclusion to ethnicity. See Farley, *Majority-*

Third, one's religion and economic status should not be part of what defines someone's ethnicity. Here I am departing from the definition cited above from the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, which includes religion as one factor that shapes ethnic identity. While religion certainly guides many of the customs that dictate behavior, a Christian definition of ethnicity needs to keep religion and ethnicity separate for one simple reason: conversion to Christ does not place someone in a new ethnic group. Likewise, one's economic status should also not be part of the definition of ethnicity. Even though income affects many aspects of the human experience, economic factors are so local that it seems ill-advised to link an ethnic boundary to finances. A drought can hit a farming community or a large factory can close in a small town. This will impact the economic status of those in the town, but it will not affect their ethnicity. The malleability of economics is more prominent on a generational level. A Korean American might be poor when his family immigrated two decades ago, but now they may be members of the upper-middle class. It seems strange, however, to argue that this upward mobility moves the family from one ethnic group to another. Hence, while religion and economic status influence one's life in major ways, these factors are not boundary markers for ethnicity.

There is an additional factor that is not formerly a part of the definition of ethnicity, but it is nonetheless useful in sketching the boundary of one. *Operation World* defines a people group as "a significantly large sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity with one another. From the viewpoint of evangelization, this is the largest possible group within which the gospel can be spread without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."[62] The insight of this

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Minority Relations, 5.

[62]Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*: *21ˢᵗ Century Edition* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 757-58. According to my usage here, an ethnic group and a people group are the same. *Operation World* goes on to classify three kinds of people groups: ethnolinguistic, sociological and incidental people groups. A sociological people group is a group of people defined by their "relation to

definition is the link between effective evangelism and ethnic boundaries. When gospel

expansion encounters barriers that are not germane to the gospel itself, it is likely that an

ethnic boundary has been crossed.

Finally, I will normally refer to ethnicity and not to "race," unless I am quoting

someone who uses racial language. The reason for the use of ethnicity is not because

race is an inappropriate category (it normally focuses less on cultural factors and more on

the biological connectedness of people).[63] But categorizing people according to race has

sometimes led to abuse,[64] and modern science has not been able to delineate one race

from another biologically.[65] More significant to a theological project, some authors

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the rest of society," which may arise due to immigration patterns, class, or occupations. An incidental
people group is usually an informal collection of people who share a common trait dictated by
circumstances rather than personal choice. For instance, commuters, drug addicts, and residents of high-rise
apartments share an affinity that creates these *de facto* groups. While some philosophies of church planting
lean on the concept of the niche church, this paper will not follow these narrower definitions of people
groups. Instead, an ethnolinguistic group gets at the essence of what an ethnicity really is. *Operation World*
defines an ethnolinguistic group as a "people distinguished by its self-identity with traditions of common
descent, history, customs and language" (ibid., 756). One weakness of this definition, however, is that it
does not include physical characteristics.

[63]In fact, retaining race as a legitimate category for discussion makes it possible to have a more
nuanced conversation about someone's identity, especially in less common situations. The Asian child
adopted by Westerners will have a race that does not match his or her culture. The same is true for children
who were displaced because of famine or war. The children of cross-cultural missionaries or international
business people will face similar challenges in thinking through their identity. If the only category of
association is ethnicity, then these individuals may find themselves in social isolation. For these reasons,
Christians need not insist that race language be abandoned—all the while avoiding the abuse that racial
categories have sometimes produced.

[64]Race and science have had a sad relationship. From the seventeenth century to the earlier part
of the twentieth century, racial science produced a taxonomy of humanity that viewed different races
almost as subspecies. This framework formed firm distinctions among the races. Racial thinking during this
period did not simply divide humanity into various groups based on physical features. It then took an
unfortunate step and started making predictions about one's abilities based on one's race. Black people, for
instance, were thought to be incapable of self-government, and they needed to be subjected for the good of
all. Some scientists would arrange the races in a hierarchy, and many concluded that the inequalities among
the races were fixed. Thus, the scientific understanding of race "provided a nature-based explanation of
why some groups of people dominate, and others are dominated." So-called scientific advancements in
racial studies not only overlapped chronologically with European imperialism, but it gave a scholarly
pretext to global domination (Jenell Williams Paris, "Race: Critical Thinking and Transformative
Possibilities," in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, ed. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro
L. Nieves [New York: Oxford, 2007], 22-25). See also Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism:
Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 68.

[65]See Eloise Hiebert Meneses, "Science and the Myth of Biological Race," in *This Side of
Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, ed. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (New York:

distance themselves from race language out of fear that it compromises the federal

headship of Adam. Anyabwile urges Christians to abandon popular notions of race

because "what we call 'race', does not, in fact exist."[66] Most of the Christian literature

related to the multi-ethnic mandate uses ethnicity over race, so I will follow suit to avoid

confusion.[67]

Multi-Ethnic

The most widely accepted definition of a multi-ethnic[68] church is a

congregation in which the majority ethnicity does not constitute more than 80 percent of

the attendance.[69] If a church with one hundred in attendance has eighty African

Americans, ten Anglos, and ten Native Americans, it is multi-ethnic. If it has eighty-one

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Oxford, 2007).

[66]Thabiti Anyabwile, "Bearing the Image," in *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 60. Piper holds a similar view, but he acknowledges that racial language is a permanent fixture in the English language. He does not avoid "race" and "racial" in his treatise on the subject. Yet he urges readers to adopt "ethnicity" as the preferred term for eight reasons. First, if race is linked to physical differences between peoples, there seems to be no clear line where one race ends and another begins. Second, all races are mixed races. Third, all people are related in Adam (Acts 17:26). Fourth, physical differences between people can be classified in a variety of ways that produce different results. Fifth, physical differences among people are insignificant when compared to the greatness shared by all humans as image bearers of God. Sixth, race language has historically classified some groups as inferior to others. Seventh, race as a classification of physical features is not found in the Bible. Piper's eighth reason for preferring "ethnicity" over "race" language is that the former is far more helpful in isolating the practical factors that produce differences among humans (Piper, *Bloodlines*, 235-38).

[67]Scripture is not particularly concerned with the modern parsing between race and ethnicity. The OT seems to identify people more by nationality than race or ethnicity. Goliath considers himself a Philistine (1 Sam 17:8); Ruth is a Moabite (Ruth 1:22). "In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job" (Job 1:1). David had "Uriah the Hittite" murdered (2 Sam 11:6). The primary label people adopt seems to be the place of their origin. Israel's emphasis on her twelve tribes illustrates the same tendency, as does the table of nations in Gen 10. Often the NT authors paint with a broad brush and categorize humanity into the distinctly Jewish framework of Jews and Gentiles or Jews and Greeks. However, the primary way of identifying others in the NT is still based on where they are from. The woman at the well is a Samaritan (John 4:9), and Peter is identified as a disciple of Jesus "for you are a Galilean" (Mark 14:70). The Jews at Pentecost are God-fearers "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Altogether, Scripture normally groups people based on where they live, insinuating that people from the same area are often like each other. Whether these groupings constitute a race or an ethnicity seems immaterial for biblical authors.

[68]McIntosh and McMahan provide a concise but sufficient discussion of why "multi-ethnic" is the preferred term in this discussion compared to "multinational," "multiracial" or "multicultural" (*Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community*, 23-26).

[69]Curtis DeYoung et al., *United by Faith*, 2.

African Americans, it is considered mono-ethnic, regardless of the ethnicity of the remaining nineteen. A couple of reasons are given why 80 percent is the key number. The first reason is mathematical. If each church member meets twenty people randomly, there is a 99 percent chance that an individual will meet someone of a different ethnicity.[70] The second reason is that 20 percent represents a critical mass such that an individual of the minority is no longer viewed as the token minority.[71] Twenty percent representation may also be enough people to have that group's interests represented in the church.

Branson and Martínez do not think 20 percent representation is enough to shift a church culture, but they acknowledge that even a church with less than 20 percent minority representation can affect the overall attitude of the congregation.[72] For instance, even the presence of one Latino family can affect how a church publically talks about immigration.[73] DeYmaz also is not satisfied with 20 percent diversity. He has a tidy way to cast his vision. He hopes that 20 percent of American churches will reach 20 percent diversity by 2020. If this preliminary goal is obtained, he hopes that 50 percent of American churches will achieve 50 percent diversity by 2050.[74]

The above contrasts Paul Hiebert's definition of a multi-ethnic church, which is

> a church in which there is (1) an attitude and practice of accepting people of all ethnic, class and national origins as equal and fully participating members and

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[70]The math demonstrating this dynamic is: $0.8^{20} = 0.0115$, which indicates there is a 1.15 percent chance of someone meeting 20 other people all from the same ethnicity.

[71]See DeYoung et al., *United by Faith*, 198.

[72]Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership,* 92.

[73]Mark Chaves, Shawna Anderson, and Jason Byassee, *American Congregations at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, National Congregations Study, June 2009, accessed July 11, 2014, http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSII_report_final.pdf, 7. This study conducted by Duke University provides an extensive look into the characteristics of American congregations.

[74]DeYmaz and Li, *Ethnic Blends*, 28.

ministers in the fellowship of the church; and (2) the manifestation of this attitude and practice by the involvement of people from different ethnic, social and national communities as members in the church.[75]

Hiebert's definition draws too much attention to the church's intention rather than its attendance. The most useful criterion seems to be who the church is currently reaching, not who they hope to reach.

Mono-ethnic

A mono-ethnic church is a congregation where more than 80 percent of the church is from the same ethnicity. I will also use similar terms like "ethnic-specific," "ethnically similar," and "homogeneous"[76] to refer to mono-ethnic churches.

This definition is more important than any other in this paper because referring to a mono-ethnic church creates much room for misunderstanding. Just as a multi-ethnic church is defined by whom it reaches and not by whom it hopes to reach, a mono-ethnic church is defined by whom it reaches, not by whom it hopes to reach. In other words, a church may deeply desire to reach representatives from several different ethnicities. It may even believe the Bible teaches the multi-ethnic mandate. But if it primarily reaches a single ethnic group, then it is still a mono-ethnic church. The term, then, does not define the hopes of the church *or the target audience of the church*. I will argue that a mono-ethnic church should not simply be concerned about reaching its own ethnicity. An African American congregation needs to be concerned about reaching the Latino community in that city. Nevertheless, if its outreach efforts end up reaching the African American community only, it is a mono-ethnic church. This distinction is so important

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[75]Quoted in Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 149. Ortiz's source for Hiebert is personal correspondence (August 12, 1994).

[76]Some literature in the multi-ethnic church movement will refer to "homogenous" churches instead of "homogeneous" churches (see DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 32, 140, 154). But DeYmaz also refers to homogeneous churches with no apparent difference in meaning (ibid., 18-19). Although the terms are used interchangeably, both referring to how a congregation is full of people who are similar to one another, the preferred term is homogeneous, which I will use throughout.

because a mono-ethnic church cannot be presented as a congregation that cares only about its own ethnic group. Such a perspective would be unbiblical.

Hence, I will refer throughout this dissertation to churches as Anglo/white, African-American/black, Korean, Latino, and so on.[77] But these titles are only descriptive of who comes to a particular church, and they normally suggest that the worship service is affected by the dominant culture. They are not meant to convey that only those groups are welcome in the church, or that those are the only groups to which a church ministers.

Segregation and Racial Reconciliation

Two terms I will generally avoid are "segregation/segregated" and "racial reconciliation" because both create confusion in this discussion. Technically a mono-ethnic church is a segregated church in the sense that people are actually separated into different congregations. But segregation often is used to refer to an intentional or coerced division. In this manner a mono-ethnic church is not a segregated church because no Christians should be prohibited from joining any church.[78] Thus, I will not use this term, nor will I refer to racial reconciliation (unless I am quoting someone).

Racial reconciliation is rather common in the literature that pertains to this topic. The problem with this term is three-fold. First, it uses "race" language, which I am avoiding for reasons listed above. Second, reconciliation assumes that two parties were once together and are now apart. But the reality is that many members of mono-ethnic churches (including their ancestors) never have had meaningful relationships with other ethnic groups in the same city. A Somali congregation may not have any prior

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[77]By using these labels I am trying to reference some of the more common mono-ethnic churches in America today. But they are not fixed categories. Latino congregations could certainly be subdivided into different ethnic groups.

[78]I am stating a general principle. Naturally differences over doctrine and modes of baptism can affect who the eligible members of a particular congregation are.

history with a Korean congregation, so to speak about reconciliation between the two does not make sense. Third, and most problematic, reconciliation connotes discord. Friends need to be reconciled only after an argument. Man needs to be reconciled to God because enmity defines the relationship apart from Christ. Reconciliation replaces hatred with love. Thus, when advocates of the multi-ethnic mandate argue for racial reconciliation, they are assuming (or implying) the reason that people are not worshiping together on Sunday is because of hatred or dislike. This is not the case, and it skews the conversation in a negative direction. Christians always need to promote racial reconciliation on all levels because there is never a justifiable reason to hate a different ethnicity. But to ask if a church must promote racial reconciliation and to ask if a church must be multi-ethnic are to ask two very different questions.

Background

My exposure to the multi-ethnic church movement has come in two forms—my own church experience and courses and seminars at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. My interest in this topic began in 2006 while a member at Immanuel Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. I was involved in an evangelistic outreach of the church from 2006 through 2010, and I led this ministry beginning in 2007. Immanuel at that time was an inner-city church comprised of mostly middle income white Americans, many of whom were college or seminary students. The pastors wished to create an ethnically diverse congregation, so they have adopted the following vision statement: "Building a community from all cultures where Christ is king." I led the evangelism teams to a housing project area, Sheppard Square.[79] Nearly all of the residents of Sheppard Square were African American or Somali, yet nearly all of the church members participating in the evangelism ministry were Caucasian.

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[79]This housing development was demolished in 2012.

Our evangelism fostered new friendships, which led some to visit our church on Sunday mornings. However, no one who expressed a desire to follow Christ was assimilated into the church, while some expressed an interest in participating in an African American congregation. When I asked individuals what they thought of my church, they sometimes cited cultural differences. This difficulty led me to consider whether planting an African American congregation in their area would be a better way to reach them, but this approach was not consistent with the church's vision. The difference between the church's multi-ethnic goal and what I considered evangelistically effective (a mono-ethnic church plant) led me to reconsider whether Scripture calls all churches to pursue ethnic diversity within the same congregation.

Immanuel also participated in joint worship services with Grace United Community Church, an African American church less than two blocks away. Worshipping alongside black brothers and sisters revealed to me that a lot of what I considered worship was actually "white worship." For instance, the music, preaching, and the way the offering was received were all quite different. I did not feel as comfortable as I did at Immanuel, which helped me realize how some visitors from a different culture might feel when they visited my church.

Moreover, I spent five months in Amman, Jordan, in 2004, and I attended both an Arab congregation and an international congregation. This time on the mission field also exposed me to worship practices from different ethnic groups, and it laid a foundation in my mind for the flexible ways Christianity can adapt to different cultures.

In 2012 I assumed the pastorate of Great Crossing Baptist Church in Georgetown, Kentucky. Our congregation is entirely white, and we partner with a nearby African American congregation to conduct joint worship services annually.[80]

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[80]When I became pastor, Great Crossing Baptist Church already had the custom of doing a joint sunrise service with this African-American church every Easter. I am leading us to do joint worship services more frequently, some of which will be during the main worship hour.

The second source for background in this topic is my research at Southern Seminary. While I was leading the evangelism teams at Immanuel, I was also finishing my Master of Divinity degree. The last course I completed was "Introduction to Evangelism and Church Growth," which exposed me to the work of Donald McGavran, C. Peter Wagner and the homogeneous unit principle (HUP).[81] Through this class I realized that scholars and practitioners had been discussing ethnic diversity for decades, which emboldened me to pursue a Ph.D. in Evangelism and Church Growth so that I could study this topic in more depth.

My doctoral seminars further allowed me to investigate my thesis. A seminar in Ecclesiology introduced me to many authors within the multi-ethnic church movement. Here I became familiar with Mark DeYmaz's *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* and his argument that the pursuit of multi-ethnicity is a biblical mandate. A seminar on the atonement allowed me to examine the relationship between Christ's death and reconciliation between different ethnic groups. In addition, a seminar on a Theology of Evangelism led to a significant shift in thinking; it redirected my studies from an examination of the (im)propriety of the HUP to an examination solely into ethnic diversity.[82] Finally, an urban ministry colloquium reinforced the need for each church to own its responsibility reach the various people groups in one's city.

Methodology

The methodology below will comment on the paper's argumentation, the sources needed to make this argument, and a few delimitations of this project.

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[81]The HUP is normally defined as follows: "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers" (Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. C. Peter Wagner [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], 163). I will demonstrate below that the goal of this dissertation is not a full scale endorsement of the HUP.

[82]The HUP addresses how various language groups and ethnicities come to Christ, but it also relates to socio-economic factors, which are beyond the scope of this dissertation. See the section below on "Delimitations."

Argumentation

   This dissertation is essentially putting forward a negative argument. A portion of the multi-ethnic church movement says, "Healthy churches have to look this way." The position defended here says, "Sure, it is great if churches are multi-ethnic, but they don't have to be." Approaching this type of argument requires a two-pronged strategy. First, I will summarize each of the key arguments for multi-ethnic churches. Here I will be quoting and interacting with proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate. Second, I will respond with a biblical-theological assessment of each argument. Here I will mainly be interacting with commentaries and theological works as I explore whether the passage or argument in view leads to the multi-ethnic mandate.

   The following dissertation, then, is only a theological critique. I am not as concerned with the vast amount of application-driven literature devoted to showing *how* a homogeneous church can become multi-ethnic. Instead, the primary question in view is "Does Scripture expect homogeneous congregations to become multi-ethnic?"

Sources

   The sources used in this project were very accessible. The majority of sources are written, and I have gathered most of the relevant literature in my personal library—both monographs and articles. Other literature was available at Boyce Library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, through inter-library loan, or for purchase online. I have not come across any hard-to-access sources, such as rare books or personal letters, that are vital to this research. The inter-library loan of Boyce Library has granted me access to dissertations that were not held locally.

   These sources can be grouped into two main categories that are "seminal" and "secondary" sources. Seminal sources are works where one of the author's main goals is to speak for or against the multi-ethnic mandate. Evaluating the case for the multi-ethnic

mandate will begin with these seminal sources.[83] These are certainly the most important

sources in this project. Closely related to the seminal sources are newsletters, magazine

articles, blogs and published interviews (often by the same authors) that try to make the

case for the multi-ethnic mandate. These sources supplement the primary sources.

"Secondary" literature is literature that comments on ethnic diversity in the

local church, even though that is not the primary aim of the given resource. An important

type of secondary literature is a biblical commentary that contains application. While

many of these authors do not set out, presumably, to promote or refute the multi-ethnic

mandate, their comments on certain texts such as Galatians 3:28 or Revelation 5:9 serve

that end. In a similar way systematic theologies sometimes provide valuable

contributions to the debate. It is no surprise that some ecclesiologies reference ethnic

diversity, but other theological fields—such as debates surrounding the atonement—

provide occasion for authors to weigh in on the multi-ethnic mandate. Even books that

seem highly unrelated to the multi-ethnic mandate will comment on the need to have

multi-ethnic churches.[84] The breadth of these secondary sources highlights the popularity

of this topic. Altogether, whether a secondary or seminal source, I will focus on the

exegetical and theological aspects of the resource as I attempt to evaluate the biblical

(in)fidelity of their arguments.

In addition to written sources, some sources are the audio recordings of

podcasts and conference messages. Throughout 2011 DeYmaz conducted a podcast

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[83]See DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church;* DeYoung et al., *United by Faith;* Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000); Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*; Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Milne, *Dynamic Diversity*; Woo, *The Color of Church;* Stevens, *God's New Humanity*; Byrd, *I Shall Not Be Moved*.

[84]For instance, see Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York City: Dutton, 2008). Keller writes, "The emphasis on racial diversity comes right out of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 2, in which Paul claims that the racial diversity of the church is an important witness to the truth of the Christian message" (44).

called "The Multiethnic Church."[85] In these discussions DeYmaz interacts with leading

figures in the multi-ethnic church movement. Also, in November 2013 the Mosaix

Global Network hosted its second national conference on the multi-ethnic church.[86]

Several workshops were theological defenses of multi-ethnic churches, and these are

available for purchase online.

Interviews play a small role in this project. I interviewed Gary McIntosh in

relation to his book *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community*. I attempted to

interview DeYmaz, but he never responded to my request. Prior to the official launch of

this research I have had multiple conversations with pastors in Louisville, Kentucky, who

are trying to establish multi-ethnic churches.

Delimitations

Two factors limit the scope of this research significantly. The first delimitation

is a chronological constraint. This dissertation will consider the multi-ethnic mandate as

presented in literature from 2000 through 2013. Michael Emerson's highly influential

Divided by Faith was published in 2000, forming the first bookend of the research.

Several proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate were influenced by this publication. The

push for multi-ethnic churches has galvanized during these fourteen years into a

noteworthy movement. This window is wide enough to include a plethora of authors but

narrow enough to feel like the time period under consideration is adequately served.

The second delimitation has a far greater impact of this proposal. This

investigation is considering only ethnic diversity rather than all forms of diversity in the

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[85]Mark DeYmaz, "The Multi-Ethnic Church," accessed November 8, 2013, https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-multiethnic-church/id413558709. The podcast is not currently producing additional episodes. There are thirty-six podcasts in all.

[86]Mosaix Global Network, Multi-Ethnic Church Conference, November 5-6, 2013, accessed January 13, 2014, http://www.mosaix2013.com/. The first Multi-Ethnic Church Conference of the Mosaix Global Network was in 2010.

church. This study will not explore other significant areas of difference in class, age, or education levels. My perspective is that Scripture encourages diversity at the local church level on these points. Ideally a church would not be homogeneous on these factors, just as they were not in the NT. Members of NT churches were not the same age. Household baptisms in Acts suggest that multiple generations were in the same local church. Paul directly addresses children and adults in the same letter (Eph 6:1-4). He expects older women to teach younger women (Titus 2:3-6), and he instructs young Timothy to enforce guidelines for widows over sixty-years-old (1 Tim 4:12; 5:9). These references imply or necessitate that multiple generations should be in the same local church.

If NT churches are multi-generational, they are also economically diverse. This is where my thesis is not an endorsement of the HUP. The HUP conversation often flattens diversity unnaturally. It considers linguistic/ethnic diversity alongside economic diversity without distinguishing between them. I consider this a weakness, because Scripture, in general, frowns upon economically similar churches in an area of major income inequality. From my view it is acceptable to have a Korean church down the street from a white church, but it is not acceptable to have a lower class church down the street from an upper class church. James 2:1-4 warns against showing favoritism to the rich man when a poor man arrives, and Paul clearly envisions those with means and without means in Corinthian churches, which gave rise to the Lord's Supper controversy (1 Cor 11:18-22). The multiple references to slaves and masters in the New Testament also demonstrate that early Christian assemblies were economically diverse (Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22-4:1).

Most proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate view ethnic diversity as one part of a greater aim of heterogeneity in all forms. When DeYmaz refers to a "multi-ethnic" church, "Use of this term throughout is meant also to imply economic, educational, and

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generational diversity, as well."[87] Careful analysis confirms that multi-ethnic churches do have greater socio-economic diversity than mono-ethnic churches.[88] For me to maintain that a church needs to be economically diverse but can still be ethnically homogeneous will appear to some inherently flawed given America's demographics.[89] But incorporating economic diversity into the conversation is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and the proceeding will analyze what Scripture says about ethnic diversity only. In the final chapter I will briefly discuss why it is consistent to support economic diversity in all churches while still allowing some to be mono-ethnic.

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[87]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, xxx.

[88]George Yancey and Ye Jung Kim, "Racial Diversity, Gender Equality, and SES Diversity in Christian Congregations: Exploring the Connections of Racism, Sexism, and Classism in Multiracial and Nonmultiracial Churches," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 1 (2008): 103-111.

[89]For an emphatic call to multi-ethnic churches that span various economic levels, see Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church*. Here Metzger merges ethnicity and economic levels into one category that the church needs to transcend.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS FOR THE
MULTI-ETHNIC MANDATE

This chapter subdivides the multi-ethnic mandate into seven arguments: the Babel/Pentecost argument, the hospitality/love argument, the argument based on Christ's ministry, the unity argument, the Jew/Gentile argument, the heaven argument, and the argument based on NT examples. These subdivisions help organize the conversation by isolating a particular aspect of the multi-ethnic mandate, but the reader should know that the divisions among the arguments are not hard and fast. For instance, the heaven argument and the argument based on Pentecost will be treated separately, but the pouring out of the Spirit certainly has an eschatological dimension. The Jew/Gentile argument is related to the hospitality/love argument because Jews are instructed by Moses to show hospitality to foreigners, but these arguments are treated separately because they arise from different biblical texts. The argument based on Christ's ministry overlaps with the unity argument, because Christ taught on the oneness of his church. Hence, these arguments are not mutually exclusive but inter-related.

Proponents of the multi-ethnic church mandate do not refer to the seven arguments by these titles. Generally an author will combine aspects of numerous arguments to make his or her point. DeYmaz uses three different arguments for the multi-ethnic mandate: The Prayer of Christ, the Pauline Mystery, and the example of the church at Antioch. Stevens organizes his thesis around the controlling idea of the church being God's new humanity, which he traces from Genesis to Revelation. While beneficial, these approaches do not provide umbrellas under which others can contribute. Therefore, the goal here is to systematize the various arguments for the multi-ethnic

mandate in such a way that incorporates multiple approaches. In other words, the hope is that the seven-fold division presented below is broad enough so that any biblical text offered as evidence for the multi-ethnic mandate naturally falls into one of these seven categories, yet specific enough to organize the conversation clearly.

Below I will survey these arguments in the order listed above, which roughly corresponds to the canonical order of their primary texts. My intent here is only to summarize the arguments and demonstrate how the advocates of the multi-ethnic mandate move from text to their present-day call for ethnic diversity in all congregations. Therefore, this presentation does not reflect my own analysis. I will assess these arguments in chapter 3.

The Babel/Pentecost Argument

Genesis 11:1-9 tells the story of how consolidated humanity magnified the effects of the fall. Instead of fulfilling God's creation mandate to fill the whole earth (Gen 1:28), the residents on the plain of Shinar decided to stay put and showcase their enterprise by building a tower to the heavens. God opposed the arrogance behind their construction, and in order to mitigate the negative effects of their depravity in the future, God confused their language so that they were unable to communicate—and thus unable to complete their building. God's response to the inhabitants at Babel was "not only punitive but also preventative. . . . [I]t becomes increasingly clear that God uses nationalism as a deterrent to sin."[1] The result of this linguistic confusion was that mankind spread over the globe, creating the diverse framework from which modern ethnic distinctions arose.[2]

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[1]David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 71.

[2]While Babel established only the diversity of languages, the resulting separation led to the diversity of people groups (see Kenneth A. Mathews and M. Sydney Park. *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011], 73).

Certain proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate emphasize the connection between the sin at Babel and the ethnic separation that came from Babel. Stevens observes, "If Genesis 10-11 says anything, it is that alienation by language is a result of man's sin and not God's original design for mankind in the *imago Dei*."[3] The observation that the sin of man led to the division of man is significant because, if the problem of sin can be addressed, so too can the problem of ethnic separation.

Indeed, God did not intend for such divisions of humanity to be permanent. Mbandi cites Zephaniah 3:9 as evidence: "At that time I will purify the lips of the peoples that all of them may call the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder." Here the prophet, looking ahead to the day of the Lord and the restoration of Israel, "seems to envision an end of the confusion of Babel."[4]

Pentecost appears to fulfill this hope established by the prophets. Peter understood Pentecost to indicate that the last days have arrived (Acts 2:17-21). "Thus, the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the time when sin would be destroyed and perfect unity would be restored among the nations and ethnic groups of the world."[5] That time is now, for Pentecost has reversed the negative effects of Babel.

One of the main advocates for the theory that Pentecost reverses the negative effects of Babel is Stevens. He argues that God needed to address the problem of sin and the problem of ethnic division. "The cross is God's remedy to the Fall; Pentecost is God's remedy to Babel."[6] To demonstrate how Pentecost remedies Babel, Stevens offers five comparisons and contrasts between Babel and Pentecost. First, at Babel, man tries to ascend to the heavens; at Pentecost, God descends to man. Second, at Babel, languages

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[3]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 72.

[4]Paul Muindi Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding of the Unity of the Church in Relation to Ethnic Diversity" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004), 110.

[5]Ibid., 111.

[6]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 115.

are confused and people separate; at Pentecost, languages are understood and people unite. Third, at Babel, God scatters people as an act of judgment; at Pentecost the people eventually scatter (Acts 8:4), but they do so to share the blessings with the nations. Fourth, the speakers at Pentecost were from Galilee, an unimpressive area of Israel (John 1:46; 7:52), which contrasts the pride of Nimrod at the tower of Babel (see Gen 10:8-9).[7] Fifth, the people involved at Babel are from the same geographic regions (Gen 10) as the visitors at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-6).[8] The parallels are intentional, and they show that God has ushered in a new era of ethnic relations—one governed by ethnic unity rather than ethnic separation. Therefore, Stevens concludes, "What we have here (at Pentecost) is nothing less than a reversal of the experience of the Tower of Babel."[9] Likewise, Boyd argues that the Holy Spirit is seeking to reverse the "effects of the catastrophe at the tower of Babel (Acts 2:5-12)."[10]

Mathews and Park also conclude that Babel and Pentecost are related, and that this relationship calls the church to multi-ethnicity:

> Acts 2 depicts the redemptive response of God to the fragmentation of the nations at Babel. The Holy Spirit came upon the congregated apostles and disciples in Jerusalem during the annual Jewish celebration of Pentecost. The Jews and Gentile proselytes who had gathered for the Feast were pilgrims from the scattered nations. Many of those nations and regions named in the Acts account are listed in

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[7]Stevens thinks this contrast highlights how God uses the lowly in Acts 2: "What about the speakers? Luke points out that they were 'Galileans' (Acts 2:7). Galilee was noted for its diverse mix of ethnicities. Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Macedonians, Persians, Romans, Syrians, and indigenous Canaanites were part of the multicultural mosaic of this region. Galileans were also known for their lack of culture and intellectual astuteness (John 1:46; 7:52). Recognized by their difficulty in articulating gutturals and their habit of swallowing syllables, those of the metropolis of Jerusalem viewed them as provincial. Once again, the allusion to Babel is striking. In contrast to the arrogant pride of Nimrod and his Babylonian followers, God now works through humble Galileans—those outside the heart of cultural and religious Judaism—to declare the wonders of God in a multiplicity of tongues" (Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 125).

[8]Ibid., 123-25.

[9]Ibid., 123.

[10]Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 254.

the Table of Nations. Luke's report on this momentous founding of the church by the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a literary echo of the events at the Tower of Babel. The gospel of Jesus Christ as preached by the apostle Peter and the founding of the church on that day formed a community that rose above the languages and cultures of the nations represented by the celebrants at Pentecost. Although the apostles received the same Spirit in the name of the same Lord, they spoke the gospel in languages that were indigenous to the countries of the pilgrims (Acts 2:11). The Spirit overcame the diversity of languages not by creating one language but by announcing the gospel through assorted languages. The cacophony of so many different dialects produced such aural confusion that bystanders thought the Christians were drunk on wine. The nations and their languages did not become one ethnic people speaking a *lingua franca* (a common language).[11]

Here the authors utilize the same interpretation as Stevens, even though they do not highlight as many literary connections between Genesis 10-11 and Acts 2. They point out that Pentecost did not produce a common language or common people group—a point to which I will return in the next chapter.

Paul also picks up on how the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost relates to ethnic diversity in the church. According to Stevens, Paul is alluding to the day of Pentecost in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."[12]

Apparently, part of the solution to a fragmented church is to recognize the miracle that took place at Pentecost, at which moment *all* true believers—irrespective of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, gender, or language—were placed by one Spirit into one body. This is the bedrock foundation for unity both in the universal and local church. Any local church that defines for itself criteria of membership or participation other than membership by the Spirit in God's universal body is in danger of compromising the very nature of the church.[13]

The truth that Jews and Gentiles are now one and that they share the same Holy Spirit "must be the one and only criteria that determines local church identity in the body of Christ. Anything less than this is a return to Babel rather than an expression of

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[11]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial* Church, 80, italics theirs.

[12]See the section on Jew/Gentile unity in chap. 3 for an additional treatment of 1 Cor 12:13.

[13]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 127.

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Pentecost."[14] But the Babel/Pentecost argument extends beyond Jew/Gentile unity. The reversal that takes place at Pentecost applies to other human barriers. Stevens maintains that a church that is divided according to ethnicity, worship style, affinity groups, or socioeconomic class is a "return to Babel."[15]

Despite the sin of Babel, man's solidarity at Babel provides a model for the church today, according to Mathews and Park. The church should strive to create a "new Babel."

> The very mention of Babel brings to mind the reputation of the Babelites as disobedient and proud. But we wish to turn the word "Babel" on its head by speaking of a "new" language. The people at Babel possessed one language (Gen 11:1, 9) and worked harmoniously to achieve a unifying goal. . . . But the "new Babel" is a unity that is *bestowed*. Those who make up the "new Babel" have received a unifying purpose that transcends human circumstances or barriers such as race, language, and culture. . . . This unity is founded upon a common redemption, the creation of a new people who hold to a common devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. . . .
> Belief in the message that the pilgrims heard in their native tongues created a uniquely "new people." The glue that held the people together was their devotion to Jesus as savior. They communally received the instruction of the word of God and worshipped the Lord in a gathered body (Acts 2:41-47). What melded them together was the saving grace and lordship of Jesus Christ. The call for the church today is to provide a place where genuine solidarity in the communion of the saints is a transformative factor in the local and national communities that they serve. *This is what makes the church, the church.*[16]

Even though Pentecost reverses Babel, the church should imitate the solidarity demonstrated in Genesis 11, only this time toward a godly end.

Finally, there is one additional component of the Babel/Pentecost argument. Stevens offers an extended argument for the multi-ethnic mandate based on the idea that demonic powers are partially responsible for mono-ethnic churches. These evil spirits are territorial, he claims, and they seek to divide humanity:

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[14]Ibid., 136.

[15]Ibid., 116.

[16]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church,* 79-80, italics theirs.

Alienation, fear, mistrust, racism, hatred, and every form of evil that separates mankind from himself and from his Creator is incited, to one degree or another, by the demonic powers that have attached themselves to the various peoples of this world. These spiritual, intangible powers "hide" behind the more tangible societal and political structures that govern our everyday lives. . . .

The implications of this biblical view of reality must not be ignored when considering the present day ethnic divides both in society and in the church. All forms of racism, ethnic hatred, or the alienation of nations are ultimately incited by the very powers that seek to divide and deconstruct humanity as the *imago Dei*.[17]

In other words, divisions that exist in churches (and in other arenas) have demonic roots.

They cannot simply be explained by sociological principles. Stevens continues, "Behind

the divisions and resultant alienation—even behind the sociological dynamics that

contribute to the dividing walls—are the powers of the heavenly world that exert their

malicious influence upon both society and church."[18] Here Stevens seems to be referring

to the HUP, which in his mind is an expression of demonic influence.[19] The division of

churches along ethnic lines cannot be chalked up to the aggregate effect of individual

choices. The evil one is at the root of the problem.

> We will never get to the source of our segregationist tendencies until we face their demonic character. We must come face-to-face with the demonic source of divisiveness within the body of Christ and call it for what it is. We can no longer sit back and complacently acquiesce to the natural sociological dynamics that fragment the New Humanity by pushing us into affinity groups determined by ethnicity, age, generational preference, and class. The fact that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour in American culture cannot be lightly explained away as a mere sociological phenomenon. No, spiritual dynamics are at play. The powers are reveling in their success (albeit limited) in fragmenting the New Humanity into self-interest groups. If they cannot divide the church through such overt maneuvers as racial prejudice and lack of forgiveness, then they will rely upon more covert sociological currents to segregate the church.[20]

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[17]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 94.

[18]Ibid., 24, 224, 247. "Recognizing that it is not merely the sociological currents of the day but also the spiritual powers at play that are dividing our churches and community, we must devote ourselves to prayer" (247).

[19]The only specific sociological principle to which Stevens refers in his book is the HUP (ibid., 224).

[20]Ibid., 189-90.

What connection do territorial spirits have to the Babel/Pentecost argument? According to Stephens, the spirits correspond to the ethnic divisions established at Babel. When God divided the nations at Babel, he seemingly assigned various territorial spirits from his celestial court over certain peoples. These angels/demons now influence the various peoples of the earth. Stevens finds support for this theory in Deuteronomy 32:8: "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God."[21] Stevens understands the "sons of God" to refer to members of God's celestial court, both good and evil. They are the same cosmic beings referred to in the NT as the "angels," "demons," "authorities," and "powers." So when Deuteronomy 32:8 states that God "divided mankind . . . according to the number of the sons of God," Moses is saying that God has assigned particular spiritual powers to particular people groups.[22] Daniel 10 seems to confirm the possibility that demons exist as territorial spirits, when a territorial spirit over Persia resists Gabriel, which manifests itself in earthly conflicts.[23]

This conversation is relevant to the multi-ethnic mandate because Stevens maintains Deuteronomy 32:8 has linguistic parallels to the Babel account.[24] It serves as

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[21]Stevens' conclusion leans heavily on a reading of Deut 32:8 that follows the Dead Sea Scrolls and the LXX over the Masoretic text. It therefore translates the final phrase "sons of God" rather than "sons of Israel." So, the RSV: "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the *sons of God*." The NIV follows the Masoretic: "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the *sons of Israel*." If the verse were rendered "sons of Israel," then it would be more difficult for Stevens to make his case that supernatural beings correspond to the ethnic divisions we observe today. For his defense of the reading "sons of God," see Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 77-81.

[22]Ibid., 81. According to Stevens, Moses seems to be drawing on the ancient near eastern tradition that the divisions of the people of the earth correspond to a similar division of the gods. Moses, then, is reinterpreting the tradition of his day, showing that the God of Israel is above all other powers.

[23]For a biblical defense that territorial spirits exist, including a critique of some of the abuses of this teaching, see Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 143-200.

[24]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 81.

a commentary on the Babel story. When God divided the languages at Babel and peoples scattered, the demonic influences which correspond to these peoples would have scattered with the people. Part of God's punitive judgment at Babel was handing mankind over to the powers that would rule over them and tempt them to turn away from the worship of the one true God. Hence, Babel did not simply create different languages; it exasperated a spiritual problem. Stevens summarizes:

> If this accurately represents the theological interpretation of Genesis 10-11 as given by Moses in Deuteronomy 32:8, then following the debacle of the Tower of Babel each nation/ethnicity of the world (with the exception of Israel) was assigned one or more members of the celestial court. The implications of such an assigning of the peoples of the earth to angelic beings—apparently both fallen and unfallen—cannot be overstated. Not only does such a conclusion shed light on God's governance of the world through angelic intermediaries, but it also hints at the spiritual powers that lie behind the ethnic strife in our present day world. Could it be that what happens on earth—wars, racism, ethnocentrism, and the like—are in some degree a reflection of what is taking place in the heavenly sphere among the sons of God?[25]

Stevens goes on to answer "yes." By building an exegetical connection between ethnic divisions, Babel, and the spiritual powers, Stevens sets up the following argument: if Christ has overcome the spiritual powers and now rules over them (Eph 1:20-22), then Christ has also overcome what the spiritual powers represent—ethnic division. He claims that Pentecost certifies this reversal: "If at Babel the peoples were divided and delivered over to the powers (Gen 11; Deut 32:8), then at Pentecost those who believe of every nation and ethnicity are united and delivered from those very same powers."[26] So Acts 2 undoes the damage of Genesis 11, and the church needs to express this victory by being ethnically diverse. Otherwise the church is continually letting demonic powers continue to foster strife between different peoples.

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[25]Ibid., 85.

[26]Ibid., 130.

The Hospitality/Love argument

The hospitality/love argument is straightforward: both the OT and the NT command God's children to show hospitality and love to others—including those who are ethnically different.[27] When Christians obey these commands to love ethnically different people, the by-product is a multi-ethnic church.

The Mosaic Law repeatedly provides protections for the foreigner. Israelites were not to oppress foreigners in their midst, because they should remember that they too were once oppressed in a foreign land (Exod 22:21). Instead a Jew should treat a foreigner as if he were one of his own, and "you shall love him as yourself" (Lev 19:34). The sojourner is among those who are called to "rejoice before the Lord" (Deut 16:11). The Israelite and the foreigner were under the same law (Exod 12:49; Lev 24:22; Num 15:15), which is why foreigners had equal rights to cities of refuge (Num 35:15). Foreigners who had been circumcised could even participate in the Passover meal (Exod 12:43-51). These verses show that hospitality toward the refugee was not simply an assumed part of Hebrew culture; it was enshrined in their Law.

Despite warnings not to intermarry or become entangled with foreign gods, Jews regularly interacted with foreigners throughout the OT. Moses' lineage seems to overlap into different ethnicities. One of David's soldiers was a Hittite, and Jewish tradition certainly praises Ruth, despite the fact she is a Moabite.[28] Mbandi surveys the unity of the people of God in the OT, including foreigners who are incorporated into the life of Israel. He concludes:

> The unity of God's people was not tied to their ethnic identification, but rather it was tied to their identification with Yahweh. The aliens or foreigners who trusted the God of Israel were "assimilated" into the community of God's people. Such people were not only fully accepted as God's people, but also enjoyed a full privilege of participating with Israelites in all forms of worship. This indicates that

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[27]Hospitality and love will be used interchangeably here, with the understanding that hospitality is one expression of love.

[28]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 98-99.

Christian need to strife [*sic*] for a unity that transcends social exclusions that are associated with ethnic boundaries.[29]

Observing how Israel crossed ethnic barriers paves the way for the multi-ethnic mandate. Leonce Crump, pastor of a multi-ethnic church in Atlanta, gave a lecture at the 2013 Mosaix Multi-ethnic Church Conference titled "Beyond Diversity: The Transcultural Narrative of the Scriptures." He began his theological defense of the multi-ethnic mandate with this point on hospitality: "Our argument for transcultural churches . . . has to begin—honestly—before Jesus, because it was God's intention before Jesus. Jesus secured what God had already intended."[30] Israel's receptivity toward diverse people, then, is a precursor to the multi-ethnic church, and it reveals that multi-ethnic worship has been God's desire all along.

The focus on hospitality and love intensifies in the NT. Christ is a model for extending love across ethnic lines, which will be the focus of the next session. Here the focus is not on the examples of love but on the repeated commands in the NT to love one another (Matt 5:44; 22:39; Luke 10:27; John 15:12-17; Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 13; 16:14; Gal 5:22; 1 Thess 3:12; 1 Tim 1:15; Heb 13:1; Jas 2:8; 1 Pet 3:8; 1 John 3:10-5:2). Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate believe these imperatives to love one another call churches to pursue multi-ethnicity. Mathews and Park surmise, "The direct command to love our neighbors as ourselves, as interpreted by Jesus, requires not only compassion akin to God's compassion but an all-inclusive position with respect to ethnic boundaries."[31] The apostles' instructions to show hospitality to Christian outsiders (3 John 5) also provides implicit proof of the multi-ethnic mandate.[32]

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[29]Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding,"153.

[30]Leonce Crump, "Beyond Diversity: The Transcultural Narrative of the Scripture," speech presented at Mosaix Global Conference, November 6, 2013, accessed February 23, 2013, http://www.mosaix2013.com/Tracks/track01#.U2Bg1yDD_IU. This resource must be purchased.

[31]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 170.

[32]Sam Petitfils, "Ten Implicit Biblical Mandates for a Multi-Ethnic Ministry," *Unity in Christ Magazine*, July 28, 2010, accessed April 6, 2012, http://unityinchristmagazine.com/theology/ten-implicit-

Although Newbell does not use the term "love," she gets at the same idea.

> Is pursuing diversity difficult? The answer is yes, very. So what's the point? If it's difficult, and if neighborhood demographics are such that at times it is made almost impossible, why do we do it? . . . Diversity is worth having because diversity is about people, and people are worth fighting for. If God is mindful of man, shouldn't we be (Psalm 8:3-4)?[33]

Here Newbell assumes diversity is the necessary outcome if someone really loves God and loves his neighbor.

Ware reminds that Christian love is modeled after divine love. God took the initiative in loving humanity. God loves man despite the difficulties involved. In the same way Christians are called to love different ethnic groups even when such love leads to difficulties, misunderstandings and false accusations. God's love also leads to an open invitation, which is not limited to a certain class of people. If Christian love is predicated on divine love, the portrait of God's love for man calls the church to have a multi-ethnic love.[34]

In short, the command to love others—of all ethnicities—and to show hospitality are commands to interact with different kinds of people. Ware warns, "Our reluctance to pursue meaningful relationships with believers of ethnic origins that differ from our own is a reflection of a lack of appreciation of God's love."[35] Summarizing the multi-ethnic church movement, Yancey makes a similar observation: "Advocates of racial reconciliation point out that it is important that Christians learn how to interact with each other. They contend that since Christ calls us to love each other, members of

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biblical-mandates-for-a-multi-ethnic-ministry/.

[33]Trillia J. Newbell, *United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 135. She also seems to recognize that mono-ethnic churches are acceptable. "I am not saying that churches that are not diverse are lesser than multiethnic churches or disobedient to God's Word" (129). But I am not sure how both of these statements can be true.

[34]A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God: How Revelation and Redemption Lead to Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 106-7.

[35]Ibid., 107-8.

different races must make deliberate attempts to interact."[36] Mathews and Park reminds

that "love for a neighbor exceeds ethnic boundaries."[37] Thus, a church composed of a

single ethnic group in a multi-ethnic community hinders its members from fulfilling the

biblical call to love everyone.

There is one more passage specifically related to this argument that deserves

special attention. John 13:34-35 records Christ teaching, "A new commandment I give to

you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, so also are you to love one

another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one

another." Not only does this text call Christians to love another, but it highlights the

effect of that love on others. The watching world will witness this love, which is

evidence that those involved are genuine disciples of Christ. Loving one another is,

therefore, not just a command; it is an integral part of the Christian witness. Accordingly,

proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate cite this verse in support of their position.[38] For

example, Ware laments, "The most segregated hour in America is still from 11 A.M. to

noon on Sundays in clear contradiction of what Scripture teaches (John 13:34-35; 1 John

3:16-19; 4:7-13)."[39]

D. A. Carson's discussion of these verses is valuable, because he shows how it

is that the love Jesus envisions in John 13 causes the world to pay attention:

> Ideally, however, the church itself is not made up of natural "friends." It is
> made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education,

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[36]George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 43.

[37]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 169.

[38]See Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 2007), 177; Bruce Milne, *Dynamic Diversity: Bridging Class, Age, Race and Gender in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 142; Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 9; Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, 110.

[39]Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, 9.

common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together, not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance . . . . In this light, they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake.

That is the only reason why John 13:34-35 makes sense . . . . If Christian love for other Christians were nothing more than the shared affection of mutually compatible people, it would be indistinguishable from pagan love for pagans or from tax collectors' for tax collectors. The reason why Christian love will stand out and bear witness to Jesus is that it is a display, for Jesus' sake, of mutual love among social incompatibles.[40]

Even if a pagan were impressed at the depth of one Christian's love for one another, he may also demonstrate great love for his own family, making Christian love non-spectacular. Hence, the defining trait of loving one another in John 13:34-35—the aspect that contrasts it against all other forms—is that Christian love crosses social boundaries. Christian love is now not just shown toward those who are culturally similar, but Christian love knows no bounds. The young love the old, the rich love the poor, the Jews love Samaritans, and blacks love whites. This is what causes unbelievers to notice the uniqueness of love demonstrated in the church.

This focus on loving one another, while basic, is foundational to the multi-ethnic mandate because the lack of love in the form of slavery is what created the greatest rift in the American church. According to Yancey, the hardest ethnic barrier to cross is the black/white divide.[41] Terriel R. Byrd advocates for the multi-ethnic mandate, and he

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[40]D. A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 61. Carson's argument is representative of how many who defend the multi-ethnic mandate reason. While recognizing the benefits of multi-ethnic churches and warning against the dangers of churches that have an inward focus only, Carson himself recognizes the strategic value of mono-ethnic churches. He writes, "A huge amount depends on the most secret motivations. Sometimes in the name of some kind of diluted homogeneous unit principle we are actually preserving selfish interests and our own ethnocentric comfort zones. On the other hand, it is possible to preserve a comfortable diversity, and be very proud of it, in a way that makes outreach into neighboring communities almost impossible. The churches I most admire, when they come to grips with these sorts of issues, work hard at trying to reflect the multi-ethnicity of their neighborhoods and regions. If they establish special Bible studies or small congregations to reach a particular ethnicity or language group, they think in the long term of how to relate congregations together, how to work together, how to insure that their children can cross more barriers, how to give some substance and reality to the demand that Christians display love for one another" (email message to author, May 8, 2014).

[41]Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit*, 157-59.

believes the historic backdrop of black/white relations cannot be ignored. He proposes that "the separation of Christian worshippers according to race and ethnicity is . . . grounded in historical animus that defies the very nature of the Church and its meaning."[42] Byrd claims that past discrimination against blacks by whites in the church has created wounds that have still not healed. He recognizes that times have changed, and today "there is no apparent outright hostility between the black church and the white church."[43]

These past divisions, however, have created two different church traditions that have solidified over time. These separate church cultures testify to the "ugly reality" that neither group has an "agenda for reconciliation."[44] In other words, a black church can be down the street from a white church, and the felt reasons for such separation may not be racism or any form of hatred. Yet the sinful origin of these divisions must be addressed. The result of facing these unresolved issues will naturally be a multi-ethnic church. Byrd asks, "If white Christians and black Christians say they love God . . . then why can't we plow up engrained social behaviors, reach beyond their past constraints and, as 'The Church,' unconditionally, love one another."[45] Hence, the hospitality/love argument not only is a testimony to the world, but it calls Christians to address and overcome wrongs of the past.

If Christians can faithfully obey God's call to love their neighbor across ethnic boundaries, then the resulting hospitality will be an effective witness. DeYmaz predicts, "I believe the homogeneous church will increasingly struggle in the twenty-first century with credibility, that is, in proclaiming a message of God's love for *all* people from an

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[42]Terriel R. Byrd, *I Shall Not Be Moved: Racial Separation in Christian Worship* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 17.

[43]Ibid., 15.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid., ix.

environment in which a love for *all* people cannot otherwise be observed."[46] The

hospitality/love argument reminds that one Christian's love for someone of a different

ethnicity is a reflection of God's love that knows no ethnic boundary. Therefore, a multi-

ethnic church is necessary to display this love.

The Argument based on Christ's Ministry

The argument based on the Christ's ministry has two parts: (1) Christ's selfless

character manifested in his incarnation and life and (2) Christ's interaction with Gentiles.

The multi-ethnic mandate flows from these facets of Christ's ministry because the church

is called to imitate her Lord.

The fourth chapter of Mbandi's dissertation is "Jesus Christ as the Theological

Basis of the Unity of the Church."[47] Here he calls readers to consider what Christ's

incarnation has to say about the multi-ethnic mandate. One of Paul's reasons for writing

Philippians is to encourage Christians at Philippi to be united. The motivation to be

united comes from the incarnation described in 2:5-8. These familiar verses highlight

how the incarnation was the supreme act of humility and selflessness. Paul's point is that

believers should imitate Christ's condescension in their daily lives (2:5). As Christians

imitate Christ's selflessness, they open themselves up more and more to ethnically

diverse relationships.

Imitating Christ's humility is essential for multi-ethnic churches to thrive,

Mbandi claims, because "the main obstacle to unity in a multi-ethnic community is not

ethnic diversity. Rather, it is ethnocentrism that results from self-exaltation and self-

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[46]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 14, italics his.

[47]Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding,"154-256. The final section of this chapter relates to Jew/Gentile unity in the early church. Mbandi discusses Jew/Gentile unity in his chapter on Christ's ministry because he sees such unity as a byproduct and foundation of Christ's ministry. For the purposes of this project, Jew/Gentile unity will be treated as a separate argument below.

centeredness as opposed to humility and self-denial."[48] In other words, the divisions that

persist in the church cannot be chalked up to cultural differences that cause one group to

prefer one way of doing things and another group to prefer another way of doing things.

Instead, there is a moral component at work in this divisiveness. Mbandi recognizes this

ethnocentrism sometimes manifests itself unconsciously in someone's behavior,[49] but

whether the ethnocentric prejudice is hidden beneath the surface or ostentatious, the

solution is the same—imitate Christ's selflessness as demonstrated in the incarnation.

Newbell makes a similar case. Whereas Mbandi focuses on the act of Christ's

condescension, Newbell focuses more on the difficult life that followed the incarnation.

Jesus' entire ministry, full of self-sacrifice and hardship, provides a model for the kind of

selfless attitude necessary to sustain a multi-ethnic church. Newbell appeals to Christ's

daily suffering as she explains why she selected the church of which she is now a part.

She, an African American, affirms her decision to join a doctrinally sound church rather

than a church where she was not in the ethnic minority. But she recognizes she may not

have had to choose between these two.

> Now, let me be clear: when I first became a Christian, I might have been able
> to find a local church in which everyone looked like me, in which each aspect of the
> worship was exactly how I'd desire, in which other aspects of church life I could
> fully relate to, *and* in which sound teaching was proclaimed. But is that really what
> we are after? How can we fulfill the Great Commission to go and make disciples of
> all nations if we all seek only churches in which we are comfortable? Does God call
> me to be comfortable and fulfill all my needs? Even though I was a young
> Christian, I knew that I wasn't called to be comfortable.
> Jesus sacrificed comfort and the throne for us. . . . He slept in the homes of
> common people. . . . He could have easily put an end to all His suffering, but He
> didn't. He didn't to the point of death. He sacrificed all comfort on our behalf.[50]

In other words, Jesus did not look for an easy life, so neither should we. Pursuing a

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[48]Ibid., 159.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Newbell, *United*, 116-17.

church where one is in the ethnic majority is pursuing one's own comfort, but Christ was not concerned about his own comfort. Thus, the sacrificial life of Christ is a model for believers as they wade through the difficulties that come from worshipping alongside different ethnicities. Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate do not simply find an example of sacrifice in Christ's ministry, but Paul himself sees that Christ's incarnation, ministry and sacrifice are the very truths that help believers overcome their differences in the church (Phil 2:5-8). Jesus' persistent selflessness is the first way his ministry supports the multi-ethnic mandate.

The second way examines the interaction Jesus had with non-Jews during his ministry. Several supporters of the multi-ethnic mandate point out Christ's willingness to cross ethnic lines and rub shoulders with different kinds of people.[51] The authors of *United by Faith* encourage churches to pursue multi-ethnicity, and they base this effort on the fact that Christ regularly ministered across ethnic lines. Even before his ministry began he interacted with non-Israelites. Magi from Asia visited Christ at his birth. Christ then moved to Egypt to fulfill Hosea's prophecy (Matt 2:15; cf. Hos 11:1). Jesus was raised in Gentile-friendly Galilee. At the outset of his ministry, Matthew appeals to Isaiah's prophecy and announces that Zebulun, Naphtali, those near the sea, those east of the Jordan, and Galilee of the Gentiles—these peoples were "dwelling in darkness" and "have seen a great light" (Matt 4:15-16; cf. Isa 9:1-2).

Christ goes on to heal the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), and in the next pericope he gives hearing to a man, probably a Gentile, from Decapolis (7:31-37). In Mark's feeding of the four thousand, the beneficiaries were Gentiles (8:1-10). The familiar interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well demonstrates Christ's willingness to transverse several cultural taboos, and the climax of this episode recounts

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[51]See Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, 15-18; Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 146-50; Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding," 165-93.

Jesus predicting that divine worship will no longer be confined to one locale (John 4:21-23). As Christ cleanses the temple of moneychangers, he makes what is arguably his most ethnically diverse statement in the Gospels. He proclaims that the temple is a place of prayer "for all nations" (Mark 11:17; cf. Isa 56:7).[52] At the end of Christ's life, a Roman ordered his execution after which another Roman concluded, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 16:15).[53] These verses all show that Christ did not seek to minister to one people group alone, and churches today should imitate his multi-ethnic example.[54]

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[52]All four Gospels record Christ driving out the moneychangers, but only Mark includes that God's house will be a "house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17; cf. Matt 21:12-17; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22).

[53]Curtis Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith*: *The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 12-20. The authors also see support for multiracial ministry in Jesus' interaction with tax collectors, sinners, the sick, and women, and they conclude that Jesus had an "inclusive table fellowship" (20).

[54]Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate have a particular interest in showing that Christ had an ethnically diverse ministry because proponents of the HUP often look to Christ's ministry as proof that the HUP is found in Scripture. In *Our Kind of People*, Wagner surveys Christ's ministry and finds Jesus repeatedly reaching out to an ethnically similar group. The disciples he chose were a homogeneous group. Jesus did not choose a Gentile, Samaritan, or even a Hellenistic Jew. Jesus was from Galilee, and eleven of the twelve were Galileans. These men would have been identified by their origin, for Peter was recognized as a Galilean by his accent (Matt 26:73). Not only were the disciples Galilean Jews, but they were a certain kind of Jew. None were Pharisees, priests, scholars or Essenes. In fact, the only disciple that did not fit this mold was Judas, who—based on his surname "Iscariot"—was probably from Kerioth, a village in Judea (C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethnical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* [Atlanta: J. Knox Press, 1979], 117-18).
 The way Jesus conducted his ministry also points to the HUP, according to Wagner. In Mark 5, Jesus performs an exorcism. The man wishes to join the band of disciples, but Jesus is on his way to Galilee (to a different homogeneous group), so he instructs the man to go home and share his good news with his friends (Mark 5:19). If the HUP is seen in nascent form in this exorcism, it is made more explicit when Christ sends out the Twelve: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6). Christ's willingness to ignore the initial request of the Syrophoenician woman demonstrates that he operates with the same distinctions that he calls his followers to employ. Wagner interprets "this unusual dialogue not so much as an assertion of Jesus' ethnicity or provincialism, but as an indication that the general lines of his strategy of ministry had been determined in accordance with the homogeneous unit principle" (Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 118-19). Wagner concludes that Christ had a ministry focused on one group because knew his message needed to be rooted well in the world of Aramaic-speaking Jews before it could effectively spread beyond these borders.
 For Mbandi's critique of Wagner's claims about Christ's ministry, see Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding of the Unity of the Church in Relation to Ethnic Diversity," 165-93.

The Unity Argument

In addition to his interaction with non-Jews, Jesus affirms the multi-ethnic mandate by teaching on the unity of the church in John 17:21-23. This text stresses the oneness of the church, and if the church is one, divisions in the church along ethnic lines betray a foundational ecclesiology. As Martin Luther King, Jr. called for an integrated nation, he believed that the local church, of all places, must be ethnically diverse: "segregation in the Christian Church is the most tragic form of segregation because it is a blatant denial that we are all one in Christ."[55] Here King concludes that proper understanding of Christian unity demands multi-ethnicity in the local church.

The unity of the church is closely related to the universality, or catholicity, of the church. Understanding the catholicity of the church bolsters the multi-ethnic mandate in the following way: the universal church, comprised of all believers across time and space, is multi-ethnic. Each local church is called to be an expression of the universal church; hence, each church should be multi-ethnic. Both doctrines will be explored below, with some attention given to how these doctrines should not only lead to multi-ethnicity, but how they also lead to effective evangelism.

Concerning the oneness of the church, DeYmaz cites the prayer of Christ in John 17:21-23 as a pillar in his argument for the multi-ethnic mandate.[56] Christ's prayer majors on Christian unity. Three times the Lord pleads with his Father to bring about oneness in the church. Christ's hope is that the future church will "be one, just as you, Father, are in me" (17:21). Christ passes his glory on from the Father to the church in order "that they may be one even as we are one" (17:22). The desire is re-expressed a third time, with the added hope that they be "perfectly one" (17:23). Christ's repetition highlights the importance of Christian unity.

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[55]Quoted by Byrd, *I Shall Not Be Moved*, 37.

[56]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 3-12.

Unity is so foundational because it demonstrates to the world that Christ was sent from the Father and that God loves the world (17:23).[57] How is it that people will come to believe that Jesus is the true way of salvation? Through observing local churches full of different kinds of people. Here again the multi-ethnic church has a missional quality. The church's oneness is not an abstract ontology but a missional reality. Unbelievers sense the unifying power of the gospel as they watch believers from various backgrounds love one another (John 17:21).[58] DeYmaz concludes, "Yes, in the twenty-first century it will be the unity of diverse believers walking as one in and through the local church that will proclaim the fact of God's love for all people more profoundly than any one sermon, book, or evangelistic crusade."[59] When the world sees a community capable of uniting those from all walks of life, this authenticates the gospel.

Allowing Christians to form congregations that cater to their worship preferences causes churches to "compromise the very unity for which Jesus prayed, and in doing so sacrifice the very apologetic that could result in so many more believing that Jesus has truly come in the flesh (John 17:21)."[60] Byrd makes the same argument: "If tradition is the handing down of customs from one generation to another, then the handed down tradition of separation of religious worshippers on the basis of race and ethnicity is one that is in direct contradiction to the prayer of Jesus in John's gospel—'that they may be one' (John 17:20-21)."[61]

When Jesus is praying for a unified church, he assumes that this unity is visible to others. Otherwise the evangelistic impact of 17:23—"so that the world may know you

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[57]Ibid., 8.

[58]Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 40-41.

[59]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 11.

[60]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 24.

[61]Byrd, *I Shall Not Be Moved,* 17.

sent me"—makes no sense. If the unity Jesus had in mind were simply a spiritual unity that exists in a mystical way observable only to God, then people on earth could not see the unity. But such unity must be seen if it is to be an effective testimony that Jesus is sent from the Father. Thus, the prayer of Christ is about visible, local churches, not just the universal church.[62]

The doctrine of catholicity also calls for multi-ethnicity. This doctrine maintains that there is one true church of which all genuine believers are a part. The universal church is not bound by time, space, denominations, cultures or buildings. [63] As such, individual churches should not have the kind of boundaries set up by mono-ethnic churches. Michael Horton sees an essential connection between catholicity and election. God chose his children for salvation from various ethnic groups; therefore, a church does not have the right to cater to a specific group. God is the only one who should determine the make-up of the church.[64]

Mark Dever also connects the catholicity of the church with the need to have multi-ethnic churches.

> This great truth of the universal nature of the true church seriously challenges our uniracial churches. Certainly it disallows churches that only admit people of one race into their membership. It at least raises questions about the practical segregation that we know in our churches. God forgive our historically Caucasian congregations for any of the ways we have wrongly forbidden or discouraged those of other races joining us.[65]

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[62]Thorsten Prill offers another example of the proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate appealing to the unity of the church to uphold their thesis: "To establish completely separate, independent migrant churches would contradict the Christian doctrine of unity" (Thorsten Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 [October 2009]: 344).

[63]For a survey of this doctrine, see Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 90-98.

[64]Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: John Knox, 2008), 201-2. Horton is just as concerned about churches appealing to certain age groups as certain ethnicities.

[65]Mark E. Dever, "A Catholic Church," *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 89-90.

He goes on to recognize that many African-American churches sprang up as a result of being ostracized from white congregations.

> Nevertheless, today, we must say that our racially divided congregations—of any color—do not commend the gospel. Understanding the catholic nature of the Christian church at least raises a question about any church that has a multiracial surrounding population but whose congregation is composed of only one race. Why is this the case? What can been [*sic*] done to better display the fact that the gospel is not limited to just one kind of person? What must we do? . . . We may need to divide for practicality over language. But, as much as we can, let us not divide our churches for other cultural reasons. The gospel is displayed when those whom the world understands as having no reasons for commonality—who perhaps even have reasons for animosity—stand together united in love. Understanding the truly catholic nature of the truly catholic church works against our racisms.[66]

While Dever acknowledges the need to divide along language lines, he calls churches to focus on the common gospel they cherish more than the cultural differences that separate. After all, the catholic church will one day become the visible church in the eternal kingdom.[67] In light of that future confidence, Horton stresses, "As much as is possible, given the profile of the neighborhoods that churches serve, each local church should be a visible expression of this catholicity that will one day be fully revealed."[68] Such effort is necessary because the gospel brings separate groups together. Horton concludes, "When the gospel unites us, there are no Republicans or Democrats, youth or elderly, rich or poor, healthy or sick, devotees of hip-hop or classical music, black, white, Asian, Hispanic, or other, but fellow sinners absolved by the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth to create his own demographic."[69] Hence, a proper understanding of the catholicity of the church relates to far more than ethnicity, and it calls Christians to receive all whom God saves.

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[66]Ibid., 90-91.

[67]Horton, *People and Place*, 202.

[68]Ibid., 209.

[69]Ibid., 211.

Stevens agrees with Dever and Horton by making a strong case that a local church must be a microcosm of the universal church. He seeks to establish his point through a word study of ἐκκλησία. By his count, ninety of the 114 instances of ἐκκλησία refer to local congregations rather than the universal church. Christians were not free-floating members of the universal church. Moreover, Paul takes the reader in Colossians from "the height of theological insight regarding the universal Church (1:18-19) right down to practical considerations for the local church (4:15). The transition is apparently seamless."[70] Similarly, Jesus refers to the universal church when talking to Peter in Matthew 16:18, but in 18:17 he instructs that unrepentant sinners to be brought before a local church. Matthew gives no hint that he is using the same word in a different way.[71]

Stevens makes these observations to conclude that there is an essential relationship between the universal church and local church, so much that the biblical authors can use the one term to convey both senses without any need to clarify. He summarizes: "It is precisely this inseparable relationship between the universal and local church that strongly argues for the intentional nurturing of diversity and multiethnicity in the local congregation. . . . [W]hat characterizes the former should be intentionally nurtured and ultimately reflected in the latter."[72]

This emphasis on the local church over against the universal church is important because Wagner offers an alternate understanding of ecclesial unity. Wagner takes many of the passages in the NT that emphasize Christian unity and claims that these verses are expressed at a supracongregational level. Christian unity in diversity exists

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[70]David Stevens, "Multi-Ethnicity, the Moon and the Local Church," *Unity in Christ Magazine,* January 31, 201, accessed April 6, 2012, http://unityinchristmagazine.com/theology/multi-ethnicity-the-moon-and-the-local-church/. The reference to the moon in the title refers to Stevens' analogy between the church and the moon. Just as someone sees only a sliver of the moon (unless it is a full moon), but he still calls it "the moon," so a sliver of the church (the local church) is fully the church.

[71]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 144.

[72]Ibid., 154.

between churches, not necessarily within the same congregation.[73] This interpretation is more in line with the HUP that Wagner supports, because it allows homogeneity at the local level while striving for some measure of multi-ethnic interaction at the supracongregational level.   According to those who support the multi-ethnic mandate, such an attempt is misguided. Stevens responds, "if such is the case, in what way can Jesus' prayer of John 17 be fulfilled? How will the world ever see a tangible, meaningful expression of the unity of believers from different ethnicities and cultures if it is not expressed in local churches?"[74] Not only, then, do ethnically homogeneous churches fail to demonstrate the unity Jesus envisions, they also deny the doctrine of the catholicity of the church.[75]

The Jew/Gentile Argument

Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ, so Jews and Gentiles worshipping together is now a "*non-negotiable*."[76] This biblical emphasis provides the strongest and most-often repeated argument for the multi-ethnic mandate. God has removed the barriers and hostility between Jews and Gentiles; therefore, God desires to remove the barriers and hostility between modern ethnic distinctions in the church. The apostles encourage Jews and Gentiles to overcome their differences rather than form separate congregations. When modern church growth writers advocate for the propriety of mono-ethnic churches, they seem to be overlooking the wealth of biblical data that specifically aims to create multi-ethnic congregations by showcasing Jew/Gentile unity.

The Jew/Gentile argument is technically a subset of the unity argument (both emphasize the oneness of the church), but the volume of texts specifically on Jew/Gentile

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[73]Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 132, 153-54.

[74]David Stevens, "Multi-Ethnicity, the Moon and the Local Church."

[75]Clowney, *The Church,* 97.

[76]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church,* 231, italics theirs.

relations suggests that it is more useful to treat this argument separately. The Jew/Gentile argument gathers at least four other arguments into one category. First, the death of Christ removed the "dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14), so the *atonement* makes the multi-ethnic mandate achievable. Second, the *Pauline mystery* supports the multi-ethnic mandate as Paul emphasizes the newness of what Christ has established in the church. Third, three Pauline texts use similar language to emphasize that all believers are now "one in Christ" (Gal 3:28; cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11). I will refer to these as the "*no-distinction*" passages. Fourth, a significant thread of evidence for the multi-ethnic mandate is the fact that Jews and Gentiles experienced *table fellowship* in the NT. The apostolic concern for trans-ethnic table fellowship reveals that the unity of the church needs to be both an ontological *and* a practical reality. Thus, proponents of multi-ethnic mandate appeal to the atonement, the Pauline mystery, the no-distinction texts, and table fellowship to defend their thesis. But these various appeals are different ways of getting at the same point: Jews and Gentiles are now one; God does not make distinctions between them; Jesus died for both; the way of salvation for both is the same, and the church should therefore be inclusive.

The Atonement

The foundational text that connects the atonement to ethnic diversity in the church is Ephesians 2:11-22. Having expressed man's desperate need for salvation (2:1-3), the expansive love of God in Christ (2:4-7), and the freeness of salvation (2:8-10), Paul goes on to explain how the cross effects reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles were originally "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel" (2:12), but now they have been "brought near by the blood of Christ" (2:13). The death of Christ tore down "the dividing wall of hostility" (2:14) so that in Christ Jews and Gentiles are now "one new man" (2:15). These two groups are "no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens" (2:19). The two groups have been "joined" (2:21).

Here Paul begins his discourse on Jew/Gentile unity and the cross by first stressing how separate Jews and Gentiles once were, so a brief sketch of Jew/Gentile attitudes toward one another will help cast Ephesians 2:11-22 in the proper light. Gentiles were hostile toward Jews. One example of this hostility is in Acts 18:2, when Claudius banished all Jews from Rome before Paul ministered in Ephesus. One of the reasons Paul likely wrote Ephesians is because Gentile Christians were boasting in their independence from Jews and thus becoming intolerant, so Paul writes to remind them of their spiritual heritage.[77] Evidence outside of Scripture also points to ethnic hostility between Jew and Gentile. According to Josephus, Gentiles "feel a hatred for our religion which is undeserved and unauthorized" (*Antiquities* 16.45).[78] This animosity toward Jews could turn violent. Philo recounts the Gentile uprising against Jews in Alexandria in the middle of the first century.[79]

Jews were also hostile toward Gentiles. Their religious separation often led to personal enmity. Tacitus (c. 55 – 120) maintained that Jews regarded non-Jews as hated enemies. Many Jews felt that God loved only Israel, and that Gentiles were created for hell.[80] Jubilees 22:16-18 showcases the disgust many Jews had for Gentiles:

> Separate yourself from the Gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs, because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated and despicable and abominable. They slaughter their sacrifices to the dead, and to the demons they bow down. And they eat in tombs. And all their deeds are worthless and vain. And they have no heart to perceive, and they have no eyes to see what their deeds are, and where they wander astray, saying to the tree 'you are my god,' and to a stone 'you are my lord, and you are my savior,' and they have no heart.[81]

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[77]Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians*, in vol. 11 of *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 126.

[78]As quoted in Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 2010), 175.

[79]Ibid., 175-76.

[80]Milne, *Dynamic Diversity*, 19.

[81]Williams offers this quotation and several more to demonstrate Jew/Gentile separation. See

In short, the hatred between Jews and Gentiles ran in both directions. Perhaps these relationships were even more strained than African-American/Caucasians relations when discrimination in America was at its highest, the main difference being that black/white hostilities were driven by skin color while Jew/Gentile differences were governed by religion.[82] And it is this acerbic relationship that Paul recalls when he reminds his readers that Gentiles "were strangers to the covenants of promise" (Eph 2:12).

Because of Christ, these two opposing groups now form "one new man" (4:15). The cross creates community by removing the enmity that hindered Jew/Gentile fellowship and replacing it with an instinct of love in the heart of believers.[83] Not only have barriers been removed, but organic unity has been created. In other words, the cross not only removed the hostility the Father had toward sinners, but in the cross Christ also removed the hostility separating individuals from one another. The atonement certainly has a vertical dimension in Christ bearing the wrath of Father, but it also has a horizontal dimension that is often overlooked. Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross serve as a fitting picture to capture this truth. Milne observes, "With one outstretched arm he grasps believing Israelites, and with the other he grasps believing Gentiles; and, in his person offered up the holy oblation, he unites the two."[84]

According to Wright, the horizontal and vertical dimensions are simply two sides of the same coin. He does not accept a clean distinction in Ephesians 2 between soteriology and ecclesiology. He understands that horizontal and vertical reconciliation overlap so much that they ought to be considered the same reality.

Jarvis J. Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 123-26.

[82]Ibid., 122.

[83]Milne, *Dynamic Diversity*, 21.

[84]Ibid., 20. Milne suggests that the "hostility" of Eph 2:14 may refer to both hostility between Jews and Gentiles and to the hostility between God and sinful man (2:16).

Part of the point is that soteriology itself, for Paul, is in that sense "horizontal," having to do with the ongoing purposes of God within history, while sociology, for Paul, is "vertical," because the single multiethnic family, constituted in the Messiah and indwelt by the Spirit, is designed as God's powerful sign to the pagan world that Israel's God, Abraham's God, is its Creator, Lord and judge. In fact, what appear to Western eyes as two separate issues—salvation from sin on the one hand, a united people of God on the other—seem to have appeared to Paul as part and parcel of the same thing. That single same thing included God's dealing with humanity's idolatry, failure to reflect God's image, rebellion and sin, and not least fracturing into different nations and ethnic groups. . . . [T]hey are all different ways of saying the same thing.[85]

Snodgrass adds that Jews and Gentiles are more than just equal; they are joined together.[86] Thus, the cross has social implications. Fong contends, "The peace that Christ provided affects every human dimension including national, social and economic boundaries."[87] What was accomplished on the cross necessitates some level of social action in the church. Fong is aware that his view may not sit well with some who would say that social action does not fit the church's mission. "If churches adopt the attitude that involvement in race relations will distract from its primary calling of preaching the gospel and observing the ordinances," he responds, "then it has in fact denied the gospel, which is concerned with bringing peace."[88]

Piper too sees the atonement as the foundation for ethnic diversity in the church. He encourages readers to pursue ethnic diversity on multiple levels, especially in the church: "I have tried to argue from Scripture that the blood of Christ was shed for this. It is not first a social issue, but a blood issue. The bloodline of Christ is deeper than

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[85]N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 127. Wright goes on to say, "The author of Ephesians clearly thought that those two (horizontal and vertical reconciliation) were part of the same act of redemption, intimately linked aspects of the single purpose of the one God, aimed at the healing of creation" (ibid., 172).

[86]Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 151.

[87]Bruce W. Fong, "Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation According to the Principles of Eph 2:11-22," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 4 (1995): 579.

[88]Ibid.

the bloodlines of race."[89] In other words, Christians of different ethnicities share more in common than two unbelievers from the same ethnicity.

How will the church achieve the unity it now possesses through the atonement? The answer is that the atonement makes love between people possible, and love leads to unity. Stevens argues that the "one new man" of Ephesians 2 is the same "new humanity" of Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3. The old man represents fallen humanity; the new man represents the church. The old man is identified by sins that strain relationships, yet traits like patience, humility and forgiveness characterize the new man (Eph 4:1-22). These are the traits necessary to sustain any church, especially a multi-ethnic church.[90] Therefore, "any status quo bias that passively accepts the present day ethnic divides in the church . . . blatantly contradict[s] our collective identity as the New Humanity."[91] So the cross makes unity possible where it formerly was not possible. Therefore, the church should make room for ethnic diversity in its midst. Citing Ephesians 2:14, Meneses admits that "loving one another across any social divide is difficult. But it is made possible by Jesus' sacrificial death on our behalf."[92]

This group that is now defined by love is no longer a Jewish group or a Gentile group but a new race altogether.[93] This new race/new man is the resolution to the image of God in man that has been stained since the fall and that has been divided since the Babel episode.[94]

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[89]John Piper, *Bloodlines*: *Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 227.

[90]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 161-68.

[91]Ibid., 171.

[92]Eloise Hiebert Meneses, "Science and the Myth of Biological Race," in *This Side of Heaven*: *Race Ethnicity and the Christian Faith,* ed. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (New York: Oxford, 2007), 45.

[93]Milne, *Dynamic Diversity*, 21-22.

[94]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 96.

So far this section has tried to reference proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate and how they appeal to the atonement to make their case. Their argument is that the cross creates unity between two formerly opposing groups. But how does Jew/Gentile unity compare to ethnic unity in American churches today? According to Woo, the lesson of Ephesians 2:11-22 is applicable to ethnic divisions today. The task for most American churches is not to bridge the Jew/Gentile gap but the ethnic divisions that define most congregations. But Jew/Gentile unity is a blueprint for ethnic reconciliation of other sorts. Jew/Gentile divisions "represent the division among all the races."[95] Woo maintains, "The truth is that the blood of Christ demolished the dividing wall between Jew and Greek, between black and white, and between any other lines of demarcation that have separated humanity."[96] Just as "Jesus' death shattered ethnic boundary markers" between Jews and Gentiles,[97] Christ's death can overcome whatever barriers exist due to ethnic difference in the church.

Williams also agrees that the Jew/Gentile unity of Ephesians 2 offers a corrective to mono-ethnic churches today. What does Christ's atonement mean for a local church? Williams gets specific: a church should strive to be as ethnically diverse as its community. For a Caucasian church to have joint services with an African American church on Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend is simply not enough. "Such services are . . . insufficient in light of Jesus' sacrificial death."[98] Furthermore, if a church claims that being multi-ethnic is not realistic in light of strong cultural differences between, say, Hispanics and African Americans, "Paul would quickly reject this

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[95]Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 253.

[96]R. Alan Streett, "An Interview with Rodney Woo," *Criswell Theological Review* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 83.

[97]Williams, *One New Man*, 117.

[98]Ibid., 138.

notion."[99]   Instead of dividing along ethnic lines, two homogeneous churches in close

proximity should merge. Williams is not just sharing his preference. Such a merger is

necessary once pastors and churches have "truly grasped the reconciling power of the

gospel."[100] Altogether, the unity between Jews and Gentiles that has been achieved

through Christ's shed blood should be paradigmatic for a real, tangible unity across

ethnic lines in local churches each week, because the "death and resurrection of Jesus

Christ fundamentally changed race relations."[101]

The Pauline Mystery

Paul follows his description of the atonement by expounding on the mystery

that was "made known to me by revelation" (3:2; cf. 3:1-13). This doctrine supports the

multi-ethnic mandate because it highlights Jew/Gentile unity. Paul refers to a mystery six

times in Ephesians (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19).[102] Ephesians 3:6 offers a definition of

what Paul has in mind: "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of

the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph

3:6). Hence, Paul's mystery is that the gospel now extends to the Gentiles, and that the

result of such expansion is the unification of Jews and Gentiles in the same church. This

information was hidden to some extent from generations prior to Christ, but it has now

been revealed. DeYmaz cites the Pauline mystery as evidence that all churches should

pursue multi-ethnicity.[103]

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[99]Ibid., 137. Williams offers some insightful ways a church can pursue racial reconciliation if it is located in a mono-ethnic community (see Williams, *One New Man*, 136).

[100]Ibid., 138.

[101]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 176. See Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, 140-47.

[102]The English term "mystery" appears seven times in the ESV, but the instance in 3:6 is an addition by the translator to make more sense of Paul's main point. Paul's "mystery" also appears in Rom 16:25; Col 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3.

[103]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 27-37. For DeYmaz, the Pauline

This mystery is central to Paul's ministry. DeYmaz believes Ephesians 3:6 and Paul's definition of the mystery is the "very apex of the book."[104] Paul showcases his commitment to the mystery by being willing to suffer for it. Proclaiming this mystery is so central to Paul's mission that he is willing to be imprisoned to preach it. As he closes his letter to the Ephesians, he requests prayer that he might boldly "proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains" (Eph 6:19-20). Paul also seems to be imprisoned in Jerusalem because he proclaimed this mystery. In Acts 22 Paul is in Jerusalem defending himself after being arrested in the temple. He recounts his testimony to the crowd, and he concludes his monologue by retelling what God had told him in a vision: "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles" (22:21). The next verse records that the audience went into an uproar when Paul declared that the God of Israel sent him to the Gentiles. "Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth!'" (22:22). Luke seems to tell the story in such a way to connect the fury of the mob with the declaration that Gentiles can be included in God's people. Although Luke makes no direct reference here to Paul's "mystery," the concept of Gentile inclusion is certainly present. Thus, according to DeYmaz, the apostle is willing to go to prison in Acts 22 and in Ephesians 6 for the same reason—to establish the priority of Gentile inclusion in the local church.[105]

The Pauline mystery, DeYmaz maintains, should not be directly equated with the gospel message. He insists that the mystery is not a synonym for the gospel: "A common error is to assume that the mystery Paul is speaking of is, simply, the mystery of the Gospel—the good news message of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, his

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mystery forms one of three reasons churches must be multi-ethnic. His other two arguments are the prayer of Christ in John 17 (3-12) and the example of the church in Antioch (13-26).

[104]Ibid., 30.

[105]Ibid., 31.

atonement for sin. Yet this is most certainly not the case!"[106] Instead of soteriology being the focus, DeYmaz sees ecclesiology at the center of 3:6. Therefore, Paul is not simply concerned with the mystery of the good news of salvation. He is specifically concerned with the "good news concerning the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church."[107]

Paul also refers to this mystery in Colossians 1:25-27. The apostle desires to make God's word "fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Initially Paul seems to be making the same point here as he does in Ephesians 3:6. But DeYmaz picks up on how Paul's stewardship was to make this mystery "fully known" (Col 1:25). If ministers proclaim the message of individual salvation but fail to include the mystery, that is, the message of ethnic diversity in the local church, then the gospel has not been *fully* proclaimed.[108] The Pauline mystery is an essential component of Paul's message.

The Pauline mystery paves the way for the multi-ethnic mandate the same way the atonement did. Jew/Gentile unity, again, is the prototype for multi-ethnic unity today. DeYmaz is not the only one who sees a connection between the Pauline mystery and ethnic diversity. Mathews and Park ask, "So what is the mystery of Christ? It is that now all races are not only reconciled but also integrated in Christ."[109] For this reason, the

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[106]Ibid.

[107]Ibid.

[108]Ibid., 32.

[109]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 208. Stevens also references Paul's mystery to support his case for multi-ethnicity: "*Togetherness* in Christ's body. That is what the biblical mystery is all about. The mystery is this: *All who trust in Christ—whether Jews or Gentiles (i.e. all non-Jews)—enjoy equality and full privileges before God, having been united in this one organic body called the New Humanity*" (Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 112-13, italics his). Similarly, Ware: "God has communicated, by special revelation, that the New Testament church is a multiethnic church. Paul says that God made a

mystery that needs to be preached is not just a message about eternal life, but also about

ethnic unity.

> The Asian Christians should proclaim to Hispanic Christians: "We are now reconciled and united in Christ Jesus." The white Christians should proclaim to black Christians: "There is now no enmity between races in Christ Jesus!" The Indian Christians should proclaim to the Hispanic Christians: "Because of the cross of Jesus Christ, we are members of the same body!" . . . The message of racial reconciliation and integration is for everyone. And the responsibility to proclaim this message is laid upon *all* Christians, regardless of race.[110]

The problem with mono-ethnic churches in multi-ethnic environments is that

homogeneous churches seem to be unaware that the mystery of Christ has been revealed.

Stevens concurs with those who link the multi-ethnic mandate to Paul's mystery: "It

would have been much easier to allow believers to group themselves according to their

natural affinities as determined by color, culture, and class, but to do so would

compromise the mystery of the gospel."[111]

Finally, Paul builds on this theology of Jew/Gentile unity in Ephesians 3:10,

which explains that the mystery has been revealed "so that through the church the

manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the

heavenly places." The mystery, which is synonymous with ethnic diversity (according to

proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate), not only demonstrates that God's plan all along

was for ethnic inclusion in the church, but this ethnic diversity, once established, serves

as a testimony of God's wisdom to the "heavenly powers." The multi-ethnic church

discloses to the cosmic powers something they did not originally expect—that Jews and

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mystery known to him by revelation (Eph 3:3). This mystery of Christ was not made known to previous generations (3:4-5). It was revealed by the Holy Spirit, not to secular humanistic multiculturalists, but to holy apostles and prophets (3:5). The mystery, which was conceived in the mind of God and revealed to the holy apostles and prophets, is that both the Gentiles and the Jews should be fellow heirs and of the same body" (Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, 136).

[110]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 211.

[111]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 119.

Gentiles are brought together to form a single new humanity.[112] Therefore, a multi-ethnic

church is a testimony to those watching in the heavenlies. [113] N. T. Wright expounds:

> The critical thing is that the church, those who worship God in Christ Jesus, should
> function as a family in which every member is accepted as an equal member, no
> matter what their social, cultural or moral background. The very existence of such a
> community demonstrates to the principalities and powers, the hidden but powerful
> forces of prejudice and suspicion, that their time is up, that the living God has
> indeed won the victory over them, that there is now launched upon the world a
> different way of being human, a way in which the traditional distinctions between
> human beings are done away with. That is why we find in Ephesians the climactic
> statement: the purpose of the gospel is that 'through the church the manifold
> wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and powers in the
> heavenly places' (Ephesians 3:10). The very existence of a community of love, love
> where before there was mutual suspicion and distrust, is the crucial piece of
> evidence that tells Paul that God's spirit has been at work (Colossians 1:8).[114]

Here Wright draws on the *Christus Victor* model to show how the division-overcoming

love found in the church serves as a harbinger to the principalities and the powers that

their time is up. Thus, it is not just this world that notices the multi-ethnic church, but the

cosmic dimension does as well.

"No-distinction" Passages
(Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; 1 Cor 12:13)

Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor

free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Colossians 3:11

says, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian,

Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For in

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[112]Milne, *Dynamic Diversity*, 22-23.

[113]Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, 137.

[114]Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*: *Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 146. Wright adds how these divisions would have looked in the strife
between Jews and Gentiles: "He (Paul) sees all too clearly that if the church splits into Jewish Christian and
Gentile factions, perhaps with some Gentile Christians joining the Jewish Christians by undergoing
circumcision, this will mean that the principalities and powers are still after all ruling the world; that they
have not after all been defeated by Christ on the cross; that there is no such thing as a renewed humanity,
and that he has all along been whistling in the dark in pretending that there is" (ibid., 147).

one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

Each of these Pauline texts lists various divisions within humanity and then seeks to relativize these divisions. These divisions are somehow overcome "because Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:11). The members of the church are one despite the differences which would otherwise stand in the way of the church becoming one, because Christ has superseded these differences. Therefore, I collectively refer to these three verses as the no-distinction passages. Each verse makes a similar point in a similar way, and each verse specifically mentions the unity that now exists between Jews and Greeks.

Hansen thinks these passages were part of a baptismal formula. A key piece of evidence for this theory is that part of the formula is often extraneous to Paul's argument. For example, in Galatians 3 Paul discusses the relationship between the Law, righteousness and the Abrahamic covenant. When the reader comes to 3:28, he expects Paul to make relevant application to the unity between Jews and Greeks, which he does. But Paul goes on to reference the oneness that exists between men and women and slaves and freedmen. These latter references do not seem directly related to Paul's context, which suggests Paul is drawing upon a pre-existing source—possibly a saying uttered at a baptism.[115] If Hansen is correct, this shows that the unity highlighted in these verses represents not just a Pauline emphasis but also a major concern of the early church.

The no-distinction passages are also a major interest of the multi-ethnic church movement. It seems that these passages may be cited more than any other to emphasize the need for the local church to overcome ethnic differences.[116] Metzger appeals to

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[115]Bruce Hansen, *'All of You Are One': The Social Vision of Gal 3.28, 1 Cor 12.13 and Col 3.11*, ed. Mark Goodacre (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 5. Perhaps a clearer example of an apparently out of context reference is 1 Cor 12:13. In a section devoted to diversity in the church related to spiritual gifts, Paul highlights the unity in the church concerning Jews and Gentiles.

[116]For instance, the following authors appeal to Gal 3:28 and/or the surrounding passage in their discussion of ethnicity and the church: Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez, *Churches, Cultures*

Galatians 3:28 to showcase how the gospel overcomes divisions in society.[117] As

Christians allow consumer preference to guide church selection, the end result is usually

a mono-ethnic church. By following this market-driven approach, a church "has failed to

grasp the liberating message of the New Testament that Jesus has done away with the

dividing wall of hostility between Jew and gentile, male and female, and slave and free

(Gal. 3:28)."[118]

Concerning this verse, J. Daniel Hays points out that Paul does not remove all

differences between individuals: "Slaves are still slaves. Females are still females. What

are obliterated are the barriers formed by these difference and the relative value and

status among the people of God based on these differences."[119] Hays believes application

can be made from the divisions listed in Galatians 3:28 to the modern situation. He adds,

"For many Christians in North America today, the obvious application of Paul's teaching

on Jews and Gentiles in Galatians is in regard to the divisions of the Church into Black

and White."[120] These references are simply a few examples of the many proponents of

the multi-ethnic mandate that rely on Galatians 3:28 to bolster their argument. For Paul's

point seems straightforward: Jews and Gentiles are now one; by extension, all ethnicities

are now one. The responsibility of the church is now to live out or express the unity that

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and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011),
90; DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 129; Piper, *Bloodlines*, 174, 257; Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 109, 125, 161, 174; Woo, *The Color of Church*, 36, 86; Milne, *Dynamic Diversity*, 32, 35, 36; Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church,* 64, 145, 173; Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 117; Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit*, 48; DeYoung et al., *United by Faith*, 33, 42, 128, 149, 153, 158, 159; Williams, *One New Man*, 119, 136, 142; Kathleen Graces-Foley, *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 38, 53; Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 50-51, 78; J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003), 183, 188-89.

[117]Metzger, *Consuming Jesus*, 51.

[118]Ibid., 78.

[119]J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 186.

[120]Ibid., 187.

already is. Accordingly, the call for a multi-ethnic church appears to fit into Paul's familiar ethical framework where the imperative flows from the indicative.

Colossians 3:11 closely parallels Galatians 3:28, with one key difference. Both texts mention Jews and Greeks and slaves and free, and the additional reference in Colossians to the "circumcised and uncircumcised" simply restates the Jew/Greek divide. But the addition of "barbarian, Scythian" augments the above discussion. The Greek speaking world lumped humanity into two categories—Greek and non-Greeks (barbarians). Unlike the either/or categories of Jew/Greek, circumcised/uncircumcised and slave/free, Scythians were a subset of the barbarians—the lowest and most despised barbarians. It is likely Scythians were slaves. Yet the gospel penetrates through the most offensive cultural baggage "overcoming the offense which a Scythian might give to another's sensibilities."[121] Hence, Paul takes a step in Colossians 3:11 that he does not take in Galatians 3:28. In Colossians 3:11 the apostle moves beyond the social division that existed in the Jewish worldview (Jews versus Greeks) and speaks to the social divisions of the broader Greco-Roman world. The apostle's inclusion of "barbarian, Scythian" is the apostle's recognition that the hostility that was removed between Jew and Gentile is also removed between other cultures in conflict in the church, namely Scythians and barbarians. In other words, the added reference to barbarian/Scythian confirms the propriety of drawing modern ethnic application to the Jew/Gentile reference in Galatians 3:28 because that is precisely what Paul does in Colossians 3:11.[122]

Finally, 1 Corinthians 12:13 adds another important layer to the no-distinction passages. Here Paul seems to use Jew/Greek unity as a launching point to explain the unity-in-diversity that surrounds the various spiritual gifts. Readers should notice how

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[121]Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 193.

[122]J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 188.

Paul mentions the Holy Spirit twice in 12:13. There is only one Spirit, and all believers are baptized "in one Spirit" and "drink of one Spirit." Whether Paul is referring to water baptism or Spirit baptism does not matter. [123] What is clear is that the Holy Spirit is given equally to every believer. As co-recipients of the Spirit, all Christians, regardless of ethnic background, have the resources to worship alongside each other. The Holy Spirit does not simply cause one to be born again, but part of the Spirit's ministry is to create a congregation where diversity is welcomed, where Jews, Greeks, slaves and freedmen are all received equally. Therefore, Paul affirms that the work of the Holy Spirit at conversion is instrumental in building a multi-ethnic church.

Herein lies a key contribution of 1 Corinthians 12:13 as Paul makes explicit what was probably assumed in the other no-distinction passages. In Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11 Paul tells *that* the various groups are one; in 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul now tells the readers *how* Jews/Greek/slaves/free are one—they are one because all groups have the common experience of being baptized by the Holy Spirit.[124]

In his commentary on this verse, Craig Blomberg believes that the Spirit's goal runs against the pragmatic tendencies of some church growth efforts. He argues that this verse challenges the often-accepted HUP: "Perhaps at certain foundational levels, outreach and fellowship occur best among those most like ourselves," he acknowledges. "But the most dynamic evangelistic power of the gospel comes when the world is forced to sit up and take notice that people are loving each other in ways it cannot account for with humanistic presuppositions."[125] He laments that Sunday (still) is the most

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[123]See Gordon Fee's discussion on this verse. He concludes, "It is not baptism but the one Spirit . . . [that] is the basis for unity" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 603-06).

[124]Hansen finds hints of the baptismal formula in 1 Cor 7:17-24; 9:19-23; 10:32 (Hansen, *'All of You Are One,'* 152).

[125]Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 255.

segregated hour of the week, which is an indictment against all ethnicities.[126] Other

proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate use 1 Corinthians 12:13 like the other no-

distinction passages to highlight what ought to be the inclusive nature of the church.[127]

But Paul's additional explanation of the mechanism of unity makes

1 Corinthians 12:13 a gateway into other passages that connects Christian unity and the

doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is fitting in this section to draw attention to

other passages that highlight how all Christians share the same Spirit, and how multi-

ethnic church advocates lean on this truth to garner more evidence for the multi-ethnic

mandate.

In his article "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," Thorsten Prill

overviews the type of churches Paul planted and the verdicts of the Jerusalem Council.

He concludes that the early church's approach to the Great Commission did not include a

strategy of planting ethnic churches: "On the contrary, they provide us with guidelines

and principles that can help us develop strategies for the integration of migrants into local

indigenous churches."[128] One of his arguments comes from Peter, who proclaims that

"God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, *by giving them the Holy Spirit just as*

he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their

hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9, italics mine). In other words, God accepts Gentiles by

giving them the Spirit, so how can Jews in Jerusalem not also accept the Gentiles? The

same Spirit dwells in both. Prill argues,

> By quoting Peter's statement that Gentile and Jewish believers have been given the
> same Holy Spirit (15:8), that there is 'no distinction' between them (15:9), and that
> both will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus' (15:11), Luke assures his
> readers that all believers are equal in Christ.[129]

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[126]Ibid., 256.

[127]See Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 165.

[128]Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," 343.

[129]Ibid., 341.

Thus, Prill maintains that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all ethnicities equally is one of the reasons individual churches ought to be ethnically diverse.

Woo makes a similar case from Ephesians 4:3-6, where Christians are "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as your were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Similar to 1 Corinthians 12:13, the Spirit is the unifying agent, and Paul's reference to "one Spirit" is shorthand for the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. So Woo grounds his vision for multi-ethnic churches in the work of the Spirit that caused Jews and Greek to have a common conversion.[130] Stevens aptly summarizes, "Birds of a feather *do* flock together. In this case, the 'feather' is the shared experience of Spirit baptism."[131]

Taken together, the no-distinction passages show Paul presenting the church as a new ethnic people patterned after God's relationship with Israel. Just as an ethnic people have common ancestors and a common homeland, Paul tells Christians they are all children of Abraham, and they are all headed to the same eternal homeland.[132] The church is now one, and it needs to be one. For those who embrace the multi-ethnic mandate, remaining ethnically divided on Sunday morning is more than socially taboo. It also represents bad theology, as the subtle testimony of the church is contrary the testimony of Scripture, particularly the no-distinction passages.

Table Fellowship
between Jews and Gentiles

So far proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate have shown how the atonement removed the barriers to ethnic integration in the church. The Pauline mystery reveals that

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[130]Woo, *The Color of Church*, 44.

[131]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 128.

[132]Hansen, *'All of You Are One,'* 31-32. See also Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia, 2005).

ethnic diversity in the church was God's plan all along. The no-distinction passages emphatically declare that ethnic integration is what ought to be. Now the reality of table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles illustrates that ethnic diversity can happen at the local church level. Jew/Gentile table fellowship throughout the NT confirms that Jew/Gentile unity is not just a theoretical achievement but a practical reality that should be visible.

The priority of table fellowship stands out in two key occurrences in the NT—the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and Paul's confrontation of Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:11-14).[133] Prill argues that the verdict of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 highlights the need for Jew/Gentile table fellowship. The conclusion of the apostles in Jerusalem is that Gentile believers, although they do not need to be circumcised, still do need to be considerate of Jewish scruples. For Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians to sit at the same table, Gentiles need to be sensitive to conservative Jews whose identity was still deeply connected to OT purity laws. Therefore, Gentiles need to avoid, at least in ecclesial settings, eating non-kosher foods.[134] Otherwise communal meals would not be possible.

Mathews and Park agree that verdict of the Jerusalem Council calls Gentile believers to be sensitive of Jewish Christians who still observe OT dietary rules. Table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles *itself* is not a matter of discussion; such table

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[133]Some defenders of the multi-ethnic mandate point to additional texts to show the importance of table fellowship. Woo appeals to Isa 25:6 as a precursor to the multi-ethnic table fellowship needed in churches: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined." Woo believes Christ's parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:15-24 recalls Isaiah's prophecy. In other words, the time for this multi-ethnic banquet is now. Jesus' parable contrasted Qumran's understanding that Gentiles and impure Jews would be excluded from this banquet, but Jesus clearly seems interested in inviting everyone to the Messianic banquet (Woo, *The Color of Church*, 52-53). Metzger also points out that the climax of salvation is a banquet table for all people (Rev 19:6-9), which calls the church today to create table fellowship marked by diversity (Metzger, *Consuming Jesus*, 115-16).

[134]Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," 342-43.

fellowship is assumed. Instead, the topic at the Council is what will be on the menu.[135]

The Jerusalem Council, then, confronts strategies that depend on homogeneity. René Padilla pleads, "The Jerusalem Decree also cries aloud at every attempt to solve the conflicts arising out of cultural differences among Christians by resorting to the formation of separate congregations, each representing a different homogeneous unit."[136] Likewise, Stevens observes:

> Among all the New Testament churches, there were clashes of culture. One of the most difficult revolved around the issues discussed in the Jerusalem council described in Acts 15. The question of circumcision as a requirement of salvation was not merely theological; it was also cultural. It threatened to once-and-for all divide the early church, separating Jewish from Gentile believers. Such may have been the pragmatic route. Just as many local churches today are segregated by ethnicity, culture, or preferred styles of worship, the apostles could have proposed a programmed segregation in the early churches as a means of relieving the tension. Instead, the apostles were extremely careful not to let this happen.[137]

Stevens recognizes that unity prevails over pragmatism in Acts 15—as it should today.

This concern for Jews and Gentiles having table fellowship is not an afterthought in Acts. Instead, Luke prioritizes this theme by how he tells the story of the Jerusalem Council. Luke gives an extended treatment of the Council. He also places this episode at the center of the book, and he references back to the outcome of the Jerusalem Council twice (Acts 16:4; 21:25). These structural cues indicate how much Luke values ethnic diversity in the local church.[138]

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[135]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial* Church, 242-43.

[136]C. René Padilla, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 1 (1982): 27.

[137]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 135. Stevens also quotes the above reference to Padilla in this same context.

[138]Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," 342-43. Prill's conclusion is consistent with David W. Pao's thesis in "Family and Table-Fellowship in the Writings of Luke." While Pao does not major on the Jerusalem Council, he does survey Luke's interest in table fellowship and the familial closeness that table fellowship implies: "The preceding discussion has shown how the ecclesiological concern for the inclusiveness of the community of God's people lies at the very center of the gospel message. To talk about such concerns merely as 'the implications' of the gospel message betrays the power of the cross" (David W. Pao, "Family and Table-Fellowship in the Writings of Luke," in *This Side of Heaven: Race Ethnicity and the Christian Faith*, ed. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves [New

In Galatians 2:11-14 Paul records his confrontation of Peter in Antioch. Peter

had stopped associating with Gentile Christians, and when Paul finds out, he proclaims

that Peter has denied "the truth of the gospel" (2:14). The motivation for Peter's action is

unclear, but his behavior is clear. He moved from ecclesial diversity toward

homogeneity. Paul put his own ministry at risk when he took a stand against these mono-

ethnic gatherings.[139]

R. B. Hays sees the centrality of this episode in Antioch.

The New Testament can be shown in quite a powerful way to present an argument
for the transcending of ethnic divisions *within the church*. Paul at Antioch opposed
Peter to his face because he and his party had withdrawn from table fellowship with
Gentile Christians. Paul saw this not merely as a social affront to the Gentile
converts but as a betrayal of the truth of the Gospel (Gal. 2:11-14). To divide the
church over ethnic particularity or dietary practices, Paul argues, is to build up again
a principle of division that Christ's death had destroyed and thus to "nullify the
grace of God." If righteousness is available only through observing such practices,
"then Christ died for nothing" (Gal. 2:15-21). The church is to be a sign of God's
eschatological reconciliation of the world, and therefore a community in which
"there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer
male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Thus the
church's unity at table across ethnic boundaries is an outward and visible sign of the
breaking down of these barriers, a prefiguration of the eschatological banquet of the
people of God. That is why Paul insisted that the truth of the gospel was at stake in
this Antioch incident. . . .
    Thus, the New Testament makes a compelling case for the church to live as a
community that transcends racial and ethnic differences. Insofar as the church lives
the reality of this vision, it has a powerful effect in society; insofar as it fails to live
this reality, it compromises the truth of the gospel.[140]

Hence, the conflict between the apostles in Antioch mirrors the conflict between

proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate and those church pragmatists who emphasize the

benefits of homogeneity. Antioch's eventual pull toward ethnic similarity reminds

readers that constant effort is needed to preserve God's desire for ethnically diverse

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York: Oxford, 2007], 190).

[139]Metzger, *Consuming Jesus*, 115.

[140]R. B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San
Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 439-41.

churches. Moving toward homogeneity is a denial of the gospel, because the gospel

unites. Such unity is most visible when Jews and Gentiles, whites and African

Americans, share a meal together.

The Heaven Argument

The heavenly assembly is a multi-ethnic congregation. John sees a display of

the diverse setting in Revelation 7:9: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude

that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,

standing before the throne and before the Lamb." A similar fourfold formula is found in

Revelation 5:9, where Christ atones for the sins of multiple ethnicities.[141] J. Daniel Hays

develops an argument for the multi-ethnic mandate based on this multi-ethnic, heavenly

vision.

> The ethnic races of the world will be mixed together and brought together in worship of God. We in the Church today need to ask ourselves the question as to why our earthly churches differ so much in composition from the congregations depicted in Revelation. If White churches in North America continue to maintain their ethnic exclusion of other races, particularly Black Americans, are they not clearly moving in a direction that is contrary to the portrayal that John gives us?
>
> It is critical that Christians today visualize the true 'body of Christ' and 'the people of God' correctly. This group is *not* a predominantly White congregation! Christians who gather around the throne of God will rub shoulders with people of all races. How can we justify supporting and/or maintaining a system here in our local churches that works to divide and separate us? The ultimate people of God, as portrayed in Revelation, are multi-ethnic, in fulfillment of God's original intention. We in the Church today need to work toward that ideal as well.[142]

Revelation 5:9 and 7:14, therefore, do not just predict the future. They remind Christians

of the breadth of the kingdom of God, and they give the church today a target for which

to strive.[143]

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[141]These four terms used to describe the divisions of humanity appear seven times in Rev (5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15), each time in a different sequence. Of these, only 5:9 and 7:9 refer to the church (Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 196-98).

[142]Ibid., 199.

[143]Ibid., 205.

Genesis provides part of the backdrop for John's multi-ethnic vision. Hays understands the final day to be a reversal of the judgments given in the beginning.[144] Heaven is a portrayed as a return to Eden, where full harmony with God is restored. It is not just the curse of man's original fall that is undone, but the curse of Babel is reversed as well. He concludes, "Revelation picks up the themes of Genesis 1 – 12 and brings to a climax and consummation the entire course of biblical history."[145] Stevens also sees a contrast between the unity of the heavenly assembly and the confusion at Babel.

> While the cross and Pentecost are the foundation of the reversal of Babel, the new heavens and earth will be the culmination of the reversal of Babel. In Genesis 11, the Old Humanity attempted to connect earth to heaven. In Revelation 21, God brings heaven down to earth. At Babel, the Old Humanity built a city for its own glory. At the consummation of time, the New Humanity will inherit a city designed for God's glory.[146]

If heaven is a reversal of Babel, homogeneous worship services are inappropriate, and surely this reflects God's desire that they not exist.[147]

In short, the heaven argument maintains that heaven should be replicated on earth. The concern for the future to invade the present is the very logic of the Lord's Prayer—"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). Christians are called to pray in such a way that the values of the eschaton are pulled back into the present. Appealing to this verse, DeYmaz asks, "If the kingdom of heaven is not segregated, why on earth is the church?"[148] Each local church should then

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[144]Ibid., 196.

[145]Ibid., 198. Hays is one of several contributors who supports his call for multi-ethnic churches based on the multi-ethnic assembly in heaven. See also Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church,* 174.

[146]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 209-10.

[147]Heaven not only brings the Babel narrative to a close, but it fulfills the expectation of Zeph 3:9: "Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder." See Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 215; Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding," 150-51.

[148]Mark DeYmaz, *Should Pastors Accept or Reject the Homogeneous Unit Principle?* (Little

be a microcosm of the heavenly assembly, where believers from all backgrounds come together, and where the unifying force is not their natural affinities but their common interest to worship the Lamb who was slain.

The Argument Based on NT Examples

The last major line of reasoning used to ground the multi-ethnic mandate in Scripture is showing examples of multi-ethnic churches in the NT. Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate point to the churches in Rome,[149] Corinth,[150] Philippi,[151] and Ephesus[152] as evidence that multi-ethnicity should be normative in churches today. Advocates demonstrate how Jews and Gentiles were both part of these congregations. These churches, however, will not be considered below, because referencing them is simply another expression of the Jew/Gentile argument above. But the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch stand out as the strongest examples of multi-ethnic churches

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Rock, AR: The Mosaix Global Network, 2011), 11, accessed March 22, 2012, http://www.mosaix.info/ Resources/hup. This resource is available only electronically and must be purchased. According to Mathews and Park, Christ also provides for the multi-ethnic mandate in his parables of the great feast (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24). Christ's followers will participate in a great future banquet. This future banquet is multi-ethnic, and the point of the parable is that "the future is now!" (Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 143).

[149]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 134-35. In addition to the Jew/Gentile unity Paul is concerned to preserve in Rome, Stevens points out a unique form of diversity found in Rom 16. Here where city dwellers and those who live out in the country appear to be a part of the same church in Rome. Paul requests that his readers "Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys" (Rom 16:9). Urbanus' name means "city bred" while Stachys' name means "ear of corn." The juxtaposition of their names suggests they are part of the same house church, and the etymology of their names suggests they have—to some extent—a different culture that may correspond to urban/rural distinctions today. Stevens recognizes that readers should not form major conclusions based on the meanings of two names, "but it's worthy of note" (ibid., 135).

[150]See Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 127.

[151]See Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," 337-39.

[152]DeYmaz contends, "The fact is the local church at Ephesus was made up of both Jewish and Gentile converts and thus was multi-ethnic." He even sees a reference to ethnic diversity in Christ's words to the Ephesian church in Rev 2. The Ephesians were faithful, but they lost their first love. This lost love, according to DeYmaz, was the original love that crossed ethnic boundaries. The Ephesians once had it, but decades later their passion for diversity dimmed. Hence, Christ's call to repentance is a call to repent from losing their multi-ethnic love (DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 36-37).

because Scripture gives specific details of cultural differences present in these churches.
In other words, several churches in the NT may have had Jews and Gentiles in same
church, but the unique fact about the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch is that Scripture
highlights additional specific ethnic barriers these churches experienced beyond the
Jew/Gentile divide.

Jerusalem

This chapter has considered the church in Jerusalem in at least two ways in the
preceding presentation. The Jerusalem church is the setting for Pentecost and the
Jerusalem Council. But Acts 6:1-7 provides a yet unexplored aspect to diversity in
Jerusalem. The Hebraic and Hellenistic widows in the church were at odds over the daily
distribution of food. This rift was drawn along ethnic lines, which reveals that both of
these ethnicities were a part of the same fellowship. More significantly, as Stevens points
out, the apostles did not propose that the church at Jerusalem form two separate
denominations when conflicts arose between the Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews. While the
modern church growth movement may have opted for this solution based on ease and the
likelihood of growth, God "had other plans. . . . He wants his church to be one, not just
theologically, but experientially; not just universally, but locally. The leadership of the
early church wisely recognized that too much was at stake."[153] This appeal to Acts 6:1-7
is particularly salient for those in favor of the multi-ethnic mandate because Wagner
leans on the same text to make his case for homogeneity.[154] Stevens directly opposes
Wagner's assertion that the Jerusalem church divided along homogeneous lines because
"there is absolutely no evidence to indicate this was the case."[155]

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[153]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 132.

[154]Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 120-23.

[155]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 131.

Antioch

Two passages show how the church at Antioch contributes to the multi-ethnic mandate. First, Acts 11:19-21 records the founding of the church. Jews were scattered because of persecution in Jerusalem following Stephen's martyrdom. These Jews mostly shared the gospel with other Jews, but "some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (11:20). The Lord blessed the efforts, and the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas (who eventually brought Saul) to investigate the reports of Gentile conversion. DeYmaz recognizes that, in addition to proclaiming the gospel to Jews and Gentiles, the evangelists themselves were of different ethnic backgrounds. They did not stay in their homeland of Cyprus and Cyrene.[156] Believers were first called "Christians" in Antioch (11:26). Stevens believes this fact is related to the ethnic diversity of the church. Instead of bearing a label that identifies believers with their homeland, the disciples in Antioch are identified with Christ.[157] Because Christ is concerned about unity in the church, it is fitting that believers got the title "*Christ*ians" in an ethnically diverse setting.[158] Hence, Christian identity surpasses ethnic identity.

The second passage is Acts 13:1, which says, "Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." Earlier the reader learns Barnabas is from Cyprus (Acts 4:32) and Saul is from Tarsus (9:11). Lucius was from North Africa, and because Luke does not say where Simeon is from, Simeon was probably also from Cyrene.[159] Manaen's proximity to Herod means he may have been

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[156]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 20.

[157]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 134.

[158]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 22.

[159]I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 214.

from somewhere in Israel. Thus, the church in Antioch is led by two men "from Africa, one from the Mediterranean, one from the Middle East, and one from Asia Minor."[160]

The great contribution of Acts 13:1 is that ethnicity, or at least nationality, is definitely in view. Whereas the churches in Rome, Ephesus and Corinth show evidence of Jew/Gentile unity, "Jew" and "Gentile" are not entirely ethnic terms. The terms signify diversity, but of a different sort. The church in Antioch, however, more clearly demonstrates ethnic diversity in a church.

After referencing the diversity of the leadership, the church sets apart Saul and Barnabas for the first missionary journey. The connection between Antioch's ethnic diversity and missionary focus is not accidental. The church here cares about the world because the church is made up of the various parts of the world.[161] Yancey also connects the ethnic diversity in Antioch with its missional impulse.

> It is not unreasonable to argue that this worldwide mission emphasis was made easier by the existence of a multicultural church that could easily accept people from different nationalities and ethnicities. It is common for American churches to make a tremendous effort to support foreign mission work in order to reach people of different races in other countries and yet to do little, if anything, about reaching people of different races in their own cities. The lesson of Acts 11 is that ministering to people of different races in other lands is not a higher priority than serving those close to us. The church at Antioch teaches us that it is important to deal with ethnic and racial segregation within our own Christian congregations if we want to be ready to reach the lost in other lands.[162]

Altogether, Luke seems to go out of his way to highlight the ethnic diversity of these leaders, and this diversity seems to assist the church in fulfilling the Great Commission. Consequently, DeYmaz insists that the church in Antioch is not simply descriptive, but it serves as "indirect prescription" for the church today.[163]

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[160]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 134.

[161]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 23.

[162]Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit*, 49-50.

[163]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 24.

Summary

This chapter has presented seven arguments in favor of the multi-ethnic mandate. The Babel/Pentecost argument maintains that Pentecost reverses the ethnic separation that stems from Babel. The hospitality/love argument points out that faithfulness to the biblical commands to love one another and care for strangers necessitates a multi-ethnic church. The argument based on the ministry of Christ highlights Jesus' multi-ethnic ministry and his selflessness in the incarnation, which provides an example of the self-sacrificial character that is necessary in multi-ethnic churches. The unity argument proposes that the oneness of the church is compromised when the church divides along ethnic lines. The Jew/Gentile argument compares Jew/Gentile relations to modern ethnic distinctions. The NT emphasizes practical unity between Jews and Gentiles, which should extend to all ethnic groups in the church. The heaven argument claims the church on earth should look like the multi-ethnic church of the future. Finally, the argument based on NT examples examines the cultural diversity present in the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, and these multi-ethnic churches are prescriptive for today.

CHAPTER 3

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE THEOLOGICAL
ARGUMENTS FOR THE MULTI-ETHNIC
MANDATE

This chapter will critique the key arguments in favor of the multi-ethnic

mandate. I will respond to these seven arguments in the order in which they appear in

chapter 2. This analysis will ultimately prove that the multi-ethnic mandate is not found

in Scripture. The conclusion defended here in no way suggests that churches *should* be

mono-ethnic, only that they may be mono-ethnic if that is the result of their best efforts to

love all peoples. Mono-ethnic churches are permissible because the arguments for the

multi-ethnic mandate have a recurring exegetical problem—its proponents force certain

texts to comment on ethnic diversity in the church when that is not the point of these

texts. They often lay their multi-ethnic aspirations on top of the Bible and draw

extraneous applications unintended by the biblical authors.

A Response to the Babel/Pentecost Argument

The Babel/Pentecost argument maintains that mankind was divided at Babel

due to sin, then Pentecost reverses the verdict of Babel. Not only does the giving of the

Holy Spirit affirm the forgiveness of sins, but it removes ethnic barriers and reveals

God's present-day intention of uniting disparate peoples. Pentecost, then, has reversed

the effects of Babel, and the church should strive toward multi-ethnicity in order to

correlate its mission with the mission of God.

Two questions will shape my response to this argument. First, does Luke in

Acts 2 intend the reader to see a literary and/or theological connection with the Babel

episode? Second, if such a connection exists, does Acts 2 actually reverse the effects of Babel in such a way that means all churches should pursue multi-ethnicity? To ask the second question a different way: is it possible that Luke intentionally allows Babel to shape how he crafts Acts 2, but his intended application is something other than the multi-ethnic mandate?

In response to the first question, some scholars dismiss the presumed connection between Babel and Pentecost. Witherington does not find any definitive reason to see Babel as the backdrop of Pentecost.[1] Schnabel recognizes that the miracle of tongues did not bring about the end of the confusion in the upper room (Acts 2:6); therefore, Luke "probably does not want to emphasize that the coming of the Holy Spirit reversed the dispersion of humankind."[2]

Other scholars see a connection between Babel and Pentecost. Wenham concludes his comments on Genesis 10:1-11:9 saying,

> And Luke evidently looked on the day of Pentecost when all could understand each other's speech as a sign of the last days when all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:8-21). The hopelessness of man's plight at Babel is not God's last word: at least the prophets and NT look forward to a day when sin will be destroyed and perfect unity will be restored among the nations of the world.[3]

Bruce's comments are more explicit: Pentecost "was nothing less than a reversal of the curse of Babel."[4] Köstenberger and O'Brien see a "marked similarity" between the nations listed in Acts 2 and the Table of Nations listed in Genesis 10, so Luke may be

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[1]Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 131.

[2]Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 116.

[3]Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Columbia: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 246.

[4]F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 59.

recalling the Babel narrative to some extent.[5]

OT and NT scholarship seem divided on the relationship between Pentecost and Babel, yet defenders of the multi-ethnic mandate are quick to see a major connection between the two stories.[6] If a solid bridge can be built between the two accounts, and if the bridge shows that Babel is undone, then the work of the Spirit is then directly linked with undoing mankind's ethnic divisions. This conclusion seems to show that a proper pneumatology should lead to an affirmation of the multi-ethnic mandate.

Upon closer examination, the primary context for Pentecost is not Babel but the re-gathering of Israel. Instead of immediately weighing the parallels between Genesis 10-11 and Acts 2, the more helpful approach is first to consider what Luke is trying to accomplish in Acts 1-2. Alan J. Thompson's biblical theology of Acts convincingly shows that the central backdrop of Pentecost is the exile, the divided kingdoms of Israel and the prophetic hope of a restored Israel. Pentecost follows the disciples' question to Christ, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:7). Christ's response in 1:8, which seems to provide an outline for the rest of Acts, is neither a change in subject nor a way of rebuking the disciples for asking the wrong question. Instead, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the expansion of Christ's now inaugurated kingdom "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" is a central way the prophetic promises of restoration will be fulfilled.

This focus on Israel sets the stage for the Pentecost event, where "Jews . . . from every nation under heaven" are gathered (2:5). Luke then highlights the regions and

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[5]Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 134.

[6]See chap. 2 "The Babel/Pentecost Argument"; see David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 120-36. Woo also underscores how "Pentecost brought the tower of Babel full circle as the God who scattered people into linguistic fragments was now gathering them into a unified people" (Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* [Nashville: B&H, 2009], 77).

cities from where the sojourners have come, which represents the four corners of the earth (2:9-11). Thompson then concludes, "The comprehensiveness of this description and the emphasis on the return of the Jew from all directions highlights one of the expectations for the last days, that the exiles would return and Israel would be restored."[7]

Peter's sermon continues to emphasize the Jewishness of the audience. "*Men of Judea* and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you" (2:14). "*Men of Israel*, hear these words" (2:22). "Let all the *house of Israel* therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36). The citation from Joel 2 confirms that the day's events center on the fulfillment of God's promise to his covenant people (Acts 2:16-21).[8] Thompson, following Richard Bauckham's analysis, highlights that the phrase "whole house of Israel" (2:36) recalls Ezekiel 37.[9] Here the prophet looks to a day when the northern and southern kingdoms will be reunited (37:15-22), God's Spirit will be given (37:14), and the new David will take his throne (37:24-25). In Acts 2, Israel repents (2:38), including Jews of the exile and representatives from both the northern and southern kingdoms, the Spirit is given (2:1-4), and the new David has taken his throne (2:25-36). These connections with previous prophecy demonstrate that "the events of Pentecost are meant to be understood within the framework of the fulfillment of God's promises for the end-time restoration of his people."[10] Therefore, Acts 2 is the fulfillment of an Old Testament expectation. The

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[7]Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 110.

[8]Thompson points out that Peter even edits the original text of Joel 2:28 to make his point plain. The original text claims that "afterwards I will pour out my Spirit," but Peter preaches "In the last days . . . I will pour out my Spirit" (Acts 2:17) (ibid., 112).

[9]See Richard Bauckham, "The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Perspectives,* ed. James M. Scott (Lieden: Brill, 2001), 473.

[10]Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 112.

main backdrop of Pentecost is not Babel but the exiled Israel returning home.[11]

If Thompson is right then there is little relationship between Pentecost and Babel. While impressed by some of the parallels between the accounts, I side with Thompson and believe what Luke is trying to accomplish in Acts 2 is that God is fulfilling his promises to Israel. If there is no relationship between the accounts, or simply an incidental relationship based on semantic parallels, then the Babel/Pentecost argument fails. Whatever the Spirit is doing in Acts 2, he is not urging all churches to become as multi-ethnic as their communities.

But for the sake of argument, one can imagine that Thompson is wrong and that Luke tells the story of the Spirit falling specifically because he wishes to provide theological commentary on the dispersion in Genesis 11. This leads to the second question: does Acts 2 actually reverse the effects of Babel in such a way that means all churches should pursue multi-ethnicity? Even if Pentecost does draw upon the Babel event, I will offer five reasons why the Babel/Pentecost argument still fails to justify the multi-ethnic mandate.

First, a re-examination of Acts 2 reveals that Pentecost does not really reverse what happened at Babel. Mankind goes from one language to many languages at Babel, so a genuine reversal would bring mankind from many languages to one language. But this is not what happened. The Jews who received the Holy Spirit in the upper room were from all over the Mediterranean world and spoke different languages, but the end result was not that they began speaking the same language. They kept speaking their native tongue, which symbolizes that each ethnicity is retaining its individual identity.[12]

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[11]Ibid., 103-12.

[12]Barreto captures well ways in which Babel and Pentecost compare and contrast. He affirms some sort of connection between the two, but he is keenly aware that ethnic identity is not minimized at Pentecost: "To be sure, the story of Babel lies in the background here (Gen 11:1-9). That story sought to comprehend how human cultural and linguistic diversity came about. Here, Luke pursues a similar though not identical thought. How can the good news of Jesus be proclaimed in a world rife with ethnic and

If Pentecost is supposed to undo the effects of Babel, then why does everyone still speak separate languages after the Holy Spirit is given?[13]

Second, the setting in Jerusalem was already multi-ethnic before the Spirit fell. The Spirit did not create the multi-ethnic environment. It already existed as Jewish residents from the Mediterranean world came to Israel. To argue that the Spirit created a multi-ethnic environment is to miss the order in which the events happened.

Third, those involved at Pentecost were homogeneous in many ways. Although various nationalities and languages were present, everyone shared a common faith in Judaism. They were observing the same holiday and they each evidenced a high level of commitment to the Law, enough to make the long journey to Jerusalem. The ability to travel may also indicate they were mostly people of means. Therefore, readers should hesitate before assuming that the scene in Acts 2 had a higher level of diversity than was really there.[14]

The fourth reason the Babel/Pentecost argument fails is because Pentecost demonstrates quite clearly the need to minister to one another in his or her heart language. One must recall that the recipients of the Spirit would have been able to communicate in Greek. The apostles were able to preach in Greek. The miracle of tongues was not needed if the only goal were to communicate information about the kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit wanted to do more. God desired to make "the

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linguistic diversity? How can the gospel find expression in other tongues and cultures? What will bind these believers together? Pentecost suggests that this sharing occurs in the very midst of ethnic diversity with the Spirit's intervention as a binding agent. The Spirit permits all to hear the gospel in their own vernacular and in their own cultural contexts without requiring our differences to be brought to an end. The Parthians and Medes, Cretans and Arabs that filled Jerusalem that fateful Pentecost day did not leave their ethnic identities behind in order to follow the Messiah" (Eric D. Barreto, "Theology and Ethnicity in the Acts of the Apostles," *Word and World* 31, no. 2 [Spring 2011]: 132-33).

[13]A better case could be made that heaven reverses Babel, where believers will worship with "one voice" (Rev 7:9).

[14]To appeal to a modern scenario within my own denomination, when the Southern Baptist Convention convenes each year, residents from all over the country gather. To some extent that gathering is multi-ethnic, but there is also high degree of homogeneity in the room. Perhaps Acts 2 had a similar mix.

mighty works of God" extremely plain by having them presented in everyone's mother tongue (2:11). Here the medium really is the message. This truth foreshadows the inclusion of all peoples into God's family.[15] Hence, Pentecost prefigures a doctrine that will become central throughout Acts—that the nations do not have to take on a certain ethnic identity to inherit salvation. In doing so, God communicates in Acts 2 in a manner that is easily accessible to all listeners. This ease of communication is exactly what a mono-ethnic church seeks to foster. Non-Christians will likely hear the gospel with more understanding, more identification, and less offense when hearing it from someone who shares their ethnic worldview. That amount of contextualization is how the Holy Spirit worked in Acts 2; that is how mono-ethnic churches try to reach others as they convey gospel truth in ways that resonate with hearers.

Fifth, proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate should remember that Pentecost involved a miracle. The multi-ethnic church at Pentecost did not become multi-ethnic by everyone having an extreme devotion to Christ and an overt love for other cultures. Miraculous intervention is what made Pentecost work. The last time I was trying to share the gospel across a language barrier, I did not suddenly have the ability to speak another language, nor did the hearer have the ability to understand my words in his own language. If every evangelistic exchange were met with the miracle of tongues, then one could conclude that Pentecost has reversed Babel. But that is not what happens. When the evangelist speaks across cultures, there is sometimes miscommunication and no miracle that transcends the cultural/language gap. So while believers live in a post-Pentecost world, they also still live in a post-Babel world.

Therefore, instead of reversing Babel, Luke's point—if he has Babel in mind at all—seems to be that Pentecost fulfills Babel, or sanctifies Babel. Babel illustrated man's distance from God, and it produced ethnic/linguistic diversity. Pentecost keeps the result

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[15]See Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth,* 131-35.

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of Babel (ethnic and linguistic diversity) while simultaneously solving the problem of man's distance from God (now believers are filled with the Spirit). Whereas Babel introduced ethnic diversity into the world, Pentecost introduces salvation *within* this diversity. To invoke McGavran's term, salvation now exists among those with a "high people consciousness,"[16] and the Spirit seems interested in preserving this high level of ethnic identity—a goal attainable by mono-ethnic churches but more challenging to achieve by their more diverse counterparts.[17]

A Response to the Hospitality/Love Argument

The hospitality/love argument looks at the OT and NT commands to love one another and show hospitality to outsiders and concludes that Christians are called to pursue multi-ethnic relationships. Accordingly, these biblical injunctions bolster the multi-ethnic mandate.

Any response to this argument is fraught with potential to be misinterpreted. Who wants to argue against the idea that Christians should love others? To be sure, Christians are commanded to love their neighbors as themselves. If a believer lives in a multi-ethnic community, this means Christians are called to love people of other ethnicities. Nevertheless, I will endeavor to show that the biblical commands to love one

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[16]Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. C. Peter Wagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 155-56.

[17]See the section on "Cultural Preservation" in chap. 4. In the above response I have not assessed Stevens' appeal to territorial spirits. He claims demonic activity is responsible for ethnic division. It may be that certain spirits have been assigned to certain geographies or people groups, but the most basic reading of the Babel narrative is that God is the author of ethnic division. Even if his interpretation of Deut 32:8 and Dan 10 is accurate, all he has done is shown that there is some relationship between the spirit world and ethnic divisions. Even if these powers incite various peoples of the earth to divide, all Stevens has done is prove that demons tempt people. Therefore, when Christians see others engaging in race-based slavery, cross burnings, or apartheid, they are right to conclude that there is likely a spiritual realm influencing these behaviors. But just because some forms of ethnic division can be traced back to demonic activity, not all forms of ethnic divisions (like mono-ethnic churches) are the result of the principalities and powers opposing God's plan. In other words, Stevens' error is that he reduces all forms of division to sinful forms of division. Thus, his appeal to territorial spirits to bolster his defense of the multi-ethnic mandate falls flat.

another and show hospitality to outsiders do not lead to the multi-ethnic mandate. The central flaw in this argument is that it is a *non sequitur*. The commands to love/be hospitable have great meaning, but these premises simply to do not lead to the conclusion that is often reported. The following will critique the hospitality/love argument by presenting six propositions about a right understanding of love and biblical hospitality. Collectively these points will show that a biblical understanding of hospitality/love does not mean all churches have to be as ethnically diverse as their community.

First, OT hospitality to strangers was intended to lead to a high level of assimilation into Israelite culture. Mbandi, who argues for multi-ethnic churches, acknowledges that "aliens or foreigners who trusted the God of Israel were 'assimilated' into the community of God's people."[18] Israelite culture was not instructed to bend toward the culture of those who were foreigners. Instead, foreigners were to become Jews, hence the proselyte tradition. While becoming a proselyte primarily had religious connotations, it also impacts aspects of one's culture, including the diet and holidays one observed. The reason this observation is problematic for those who support the multi-ethnic mandate is because defenders of multi-ethnic churches often stress how minorities are not asked to give up their ethnicity in order to be a part of a multi-ethnic church. DeYmaz maintains that accommodation, not assimilation, is the goal for churches.[19] Yet, assimilation is what happened in Israel with foreigners. Thus, appealing to the hospitality tradition of the OT does not provide the yardage some have thought.

Second, love does not have to cross ethnic lines to be biblical or visible. A primary text cited by proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate is John 13:34-35. Here Christ teaches that people will be persuaded that Christians really are followers of Christ

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[18]Paul Muindi Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding of the Unity of the Church in Relation to Ethnic Diversity" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004), 153.

[19]Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 45.

because they love one another. Love is a testimony. The multi-ethnic church movement understands this verse to be commending a love the crosses ethnic boundaries, for that sort of love—a Somali loving a Cuban—stands out as unique and testifies to the truth of a Christian's faith (cf. John 17:20-21).

The challenge with appealing to Christ's teaching on love and making a leap to multi-ethnicity is that Christ did not issue these words to a multi-ethnic audience. When he commanded his disciples to love one another, he was not talking about a love that crossed ethnic lines. All of his disciples shared the same ethnicity. This observation confirms that love is still love if it is directed to someone who is ethnically similar. The apostle Paul seems to agree. In 1 Corinthians 13, love is many things—patient, kind, and so on—but "multi-ethnic" is not enumerated in his famous teaching. Likewise, Paul can teach that the love in a godly marriage is a testimony to gospel truth (Eph 5:22-33), but surely this truth holds even if the marriage is between two Christians of the same ethnicity. The love, submission and self-sacrifice of a marriage do not have to be across ethnic lines in order to be genuine or to make the gospel visible. Love is defined by the virtues behind someone's interactions, not by the diversity of its audience.

Third, a Christian can love someone without worshipping in the same congregation. A grand assumption of the multi-ethnic mandate is that faithfully loving someone means that you will see that person at church on Sunday. As Paul sought to collect money from the Corinthians for the saints in Jerusalem, he writes, "I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine" (2 Cor 8:8). The believers in Corinth were able to love the believers in Jerusalem, despite the fact they were in separate churches. When proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate insinuate that loving others means a Christian has to worship in the same congregation as everyone else, they are essentially saying that there needs to be only one church in each city—because love would eventually bring everyone together. If Christians are called to

love everyone, and if biblical love necessitates being at the same church, then it follows that all Christians in an area should worship together. Such a verdict is, of course, unsustainable. And if this connection between showing love and being a part of the same church is not necessarily in a one-to-one relationship, then Christians of different backgrounds can love another but still gather in separate contexts. A white Christian can love a Latino Christian even if they worship separately on Sunday.

Fourth, one expression of love is allowing someone to have his or her preference,[20] but a single church cannot accommodate the preferences of multiple ethnicities at the same time. Once person *A* caters to the cultural preference of person *B*, he is not catering to person *C*'s culture. One's desire to prefer the preferences of others often exceeds his ability to do so.

Fifth, love is expressed through culture, not despite culture. Love necessarily takes on cultural forms when expressed. When Christ "loved his own . . . to the end," he washed his disciples' feet (John 13:1-20). For Christ's love to be manifest, it had to take on the trappings of a cultural tradition (foot washing). One church may show respect by allowing the elderly in the church to make a major decision. A church from a different culture may think the most loving action is to let the church decide by majority vote. Here different decision-making processes are both governed by love. Culture is the channel along which love travels. It may be impossible to express love without some measure of culture being utilized to convey the love. Therefore, what better way of loving someone than to allow that person to worship in a context where his efforts to love

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[20]Rom 14:15 shows how such deference is an expression of love. Concerning the debate over diet in the church, Paul writes, "For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died" (cf. Phil 2:4). The loving action here is not to insist on one's own freedom to have it one's way, but it is to give in to the other person's preference. Some may object that Rom 14 showcases the need for multi-ethnicity in the church. Paul does not tell the church in Rome to split into meat-eating and vegetarian factions. He seeks to preserve visible unity. But the problem with this reasoning is two-fold. First, it assumes Jew/Gentile relations correspond to ethnic differences today (see below). Second, it is not right to compare ethnic distinctions to passages related to stronger and weaker brothers. Doing so assumes that one ethnicity is superior (stronger) than the other.

others naturally correspond with what feels loving to him?

Sixth, love demands that the church do whatever it takes to get the gospel to everyone in the most effective way. God's expression of love is most visible in his choice to send Jesus to save mankind (John 3:16). In a similar vein, getting the message of salvation to the nations is an undeniable act of love. Christians should be keenly interested in fulfilling the Great Commission effectively and quickly. What better expression of love of neighbor can a Christian have than to share the gospel with him? As basic as this point is, some proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate pursue a model that makes it harder to reach people. Many advocates for multi-ethnic churches actually affirm that mono-ethnic churches are more effective in reaching people. DeYmaz asserts, "Undeniably, churches do grow fastest when they're homogeneous."[21] But how can DeYmaz insist on his multi-ethnic approach when he believes there is a more effective model? Should not love pull Christians toward the biblical methods that appear to be most effective?

Carson recognizes this tension that Christian love creates.

> One must remember that there are other New Testament goals—goals which, like the passion for unity, are motivated by love. In particular, consider the passion for evangelism, the concern to win people from every tribe and people and nation. Very frequently this is most effectively and strategically done in the language and culture of the targeted group.[22]

Yes, faithfulness can call a Christian to try to establish a multi-ethnic church. But love also can burden a believer to get the gospel message to an ethnically different group in the most relatable, non-offensive, understandable way. Both are valid expressions of love. For this reason, sometimes the most loving action in a ministry setting is to foster a

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[21]Mark DeYmaz, *Should Pastors Accept or Reject the Homogeneous Unit Principle?* (Little Rock, AR: The Mosaix Global Network, 2011), 9, accessed March 22, 2012, http://www.mosaix.info/ Resources/hup.

[22]D. A. Carson, "Five Steps for Racial Reconciliation on Sunday at 11 a.m.," *9Marks eJournal* 4, no. 6 (September-October 2007): 46, accessed July 18, 2014, http://www.9marks.org/files/ ejournal200746sepoct.pdf.

mono-ethnic church that can reach a particular community in a culturally sensitive way.

Thus, defenders of the multi-ethnic mandate simply over-reach when they argue that

genuine love will always lead to multi-ethnicity in the church.[23]

A Response to the Argument
Based on Christ's Ministry

The argument based on Christ's ministry is two-fold. First, Christ's

incarnation demonstrates his selflessness, which Christians are called to imitate. The

church, therefore, should not gravitate toward the comfort of mono-ethnicity. Second,

Christ regularly crosses ethnic boundaries and interacts with non-Jews. I will first treat

Christ's interaction with Gentiles, because this reason is cited more frequently. Then I

will comment on the argument based on the incarnation.

Concerning Christ's interaction with non-Jews, the multi-ethnic church

movement has brought a much needed corrective to some reasoning behind the HUP.

Wagner argues that Christ's focus on reaching the Jews provides Christological sanction

for the HUP. As Christ sends out the Twelve, he instructs, "Go nowhere among the

Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house

of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6). Christ's willingness to ignore the initial request of the

Syrophoenician woman demonstrates the same point—that he prioritizes his ministry to

the Jews over others (Mark 7:24-30). "I interpret this unusual dialogue not so much as an

assertion of Jesus' ethnicity or provincialism," Wagner explains, "but as an indication

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[23]Readers may still ask if Christians are called to pursue relationships of different ethnicities. The best answer is "yes" and "no." In posing such a question it is important not to add any commands to Scripture. The Bible calls believers to love their neighbors, but neighbors come in many forms. Is a Christian called to love prostitutes? Yes, but he may not know any. Is a Christian called to love soccer players? Yes, but he may play only golf. Is a Christian called to love those who go to public schools? Yes, but he may be home-schooled. Christians are called to love people from all ethnic backgrounds, but that does not mean a believer should feel guilty if his six closest friends are all white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Man's confinement by time and space inherently limit the number of relationships he can have, which affects the expression of love. The essence of the biblical command to love others seems to be that Christians act in loving ways toward those with whom they interact. It does not hinge on the ethnic make-up of those receiving the love.

that the general lines of his strategy of ministry had been determined in accordance with the homogeneous unit principle." Wagner goes on to suggest that Christ knew his message needed to be rooted well in the world of Aramaic-speaking Jews before it could effectively spread beyond these borders.[24]

Wagner's analysis is problematic. To find seeds of the HUP in Jesus' instructions to the disciples or his hesitant interaction with a non-Jew is to find something the Gospel writers did not intend. These texts do not support mono-ethnic churches. Instead, these passages that show Christ ministering to Jews confirm that the gospel message really is "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16). Christ is king of the Jews, and one of his roles as Messiah was to bring the old covenant to an end, to provide a marginal harvest among the Jews, and to minister to the Jews in order to confirm their overall rejection of his message of the kingdom. To try to uncover a sociological principle about church growth behind Christ's words is to sorely miss the covenantal overtones of these passages. The multi-ethnic church movement is right to try to critique the church growth movement in this way.

But sadly, some proponents of multi-ethnic churches make a similar mistake by finding support for their position in Christ's interactions. For example, the authors of *United by Faith* comb through the Gospels and point out the various ways Christ interacted with non-Jews. Christ loved and served people different from himself, they reason, and so should the church.

Their interpretation is problematic because they too miss the covenantal context of Jesus' reaching out across ethnic lines. Jesus ministers to non-Jews not to foreshadow a multi-ethnic church but to confirm that Gentiles can be included as God's covenant children. Jesus interacts with the Samaritan woman at the well not to provide a

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[24]C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethnical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Atlanta: J. Knox Press, 1979), 117-19.

blueprint for creating a multi-ethnic church, but he does so to show that all people can worship the Lord if they worship him in spirit and in truth. In other words, Samaritans can be just as much God's children as Jews.[25] Altogether, Jesus' interactions are meant to highlight the scope of salvation, not the characteristics of a church's membership.

The other argument based on Christ's ministry relates to Christ's selfless character as demonstrated in his incarnation. This argument is weaker than the preceding one. It is a poor attempt at a syllogism: If Christ did not pursue comfort, then churches should not pursue comfort. Christ did not pursue comfort; therefore, churches should not pursue comfort.

Because multi-ethnic churches are often less comfortable, it seems these churches are more Christ-like. This logic permeates a lot of multi-ethnic literature, and the fallacy behind this reasoning can easily remain hidden underneath good intentions. Scripture often calls Christians to a life of discipleship that is hard. But the summons to count the cost of being a disciple does not suggest that Christians, when faced with two alternatives, should seek hardship *for the sake of hardship*.

Should the church also avoid air conditioning because Jesus did not have it and because not having it is harder? Was Paul wrong to want his cloak in the winter (2 Tim 4:13)? Was Jesus incorrect to teach believers to pray that they would avoid evil (Matt 6:13)? Was Paul wrong to ask Christians in Rome to pray for his safety in Judea (Rom 15:30-31)? Often the very purpose of prayer is to pursue blessings from God which make believers' lives more comfortable. So, yes, Jesus' incarnation provides a model for self-sacrifice, but biblical faithfulness is to endure hardship *when it comes*. Christians are

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[25]The story of the woman at the well marshals evidence for both sides in this debate. Multi-ethnic mandate proponents can major on the cultural lines that Jesus crossed. But it is also true that the woman, upon her conversion, shares the gospel with her hometown. Presumably this was with people ethnically similar to herself. Here Christ's "multi-ethnic" evangelism likely led the woman at the well to do mono-ethnic evangelism. This is the natural order of mission work, where a mature believer crosses a cultural line in order to establish the gospel in a new ethnic group, which then can more naturally spread along ethnic lines.

not on a mission to go out and find hardship or a more challenging ministry model just so they can mimic their Lord's suffering. To argue for multi-ethnic churches based on the idea that Christians need to be willing to be uncomfortable is simply to distract from the main question: does God expect believers to worship in a context that is culturally foreign? The argument based on Christ's ministry fails to persuade that the answer is "yes."

A Response to the Unity Argument

The argument based on the unity of the church maintains that the passages that teach on Christian unity support the multi-ethnic mandate. In essence the argument claims, "If the church is one, then it cannot divide along ethnic lines, but the church is divided along ethnic lines. Therefore, the church is not one." The most common passages used to support this argument are John 17:21-23; Romans 15:6; 1 Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 4:1-16. Below I will explain how these passages actually have very little to say about the multi-ethnic mandate.

Unity and the Universal Church

The first oversight of those who defend the multi-ethnic mandate is that some inappropriately relate passages about the universal church to the local church. In his discussion of the prayer of Christ in John 17:21-23, DeYmaz emphasizes how important unity is, and how unity will have an evangelistic impact. One problem with DeYmaz's use of this passage is that he assumes Christ is praying for the local church, but Christ actually prays for the universal church. Jesus prays that the Father will "give eternal life to all whom you have given him" (17:2). This is a reference to the elect. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word" (17:20). Clearly Jesus is not just praying for the present band of disciples or an individual church. Instead, Christ is praying for unity to prevail throughout all believers everywhere—the

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group of all the redeemed who one day will be united in heaven. The object of Christ's prayer is the universal church, spanning from Pentecost to the present and from Jerusalem to the world.

Thus, the unity in view in John 17 is probably two-fold. Christ wants the universal church to be united over time, not to be marked by divisions but to hold on to sound teaching. In this sense there is a unity that the universal church experiences that transcends time and space. More specifically, Christ is also praying that each individual expression of the church will be marked by internal unity. Christ does not want relational rifts or pride—like the problems that emerge in Corinth (1 Cor 1:10-17)—to characterize the church.

If the above is a proper interpretation of John 17:21-23, this text says very little, if anything, about ethnic diversity in the church. In fact, the very disciples who hear Christ's prayer and who were the initial objects of Christ's prayer were ethnically homogeneous.[26] The opposite of unity is disunity, not mono-ethnicity. Most people who have been part of a church know that someone does not need to be in an ethnically diverse environment to need to strive for unity and to bear with others in love (Eph 4:2). A Korean church can be internally united or full of disharmony. Asking whether a church is biblically unified is different from asking whether it is mono-ethnic. DeYmaz is simply importing his own concern into Jesus' prayer and then reading his conclusion back into the text.[27]

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[26]The Gospels reveal that his disciples needed such prayer, because they did not always get along (Luke 9:46; 22:24).

[27]DeYmaz makes a similar error in his reading of Ephesians, where he makes an unconvincing case that Paul is talking about the local church and not the universal church (Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007], 30). Eph 1:22-23 sets the context for the book, where Christ is in charge over his body, the universal church. This church is built upon the foundation of the "apostles and prophets" (2:20), which must be a reference to the universal church. Hence, Paul's "one body" in Ephesians refers to the universal church (Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 514). That Paul's "one body" is primarily a reference to the universal church is also seen in 1 Cor 12:13: "For *we* were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

Discontinuity between the Universal
and Local Church

Some advocates of the multi-ethnic mandate recognize that Scripture often refers to the universal church rather than the local church. For example, Mbandi sees that the "one body" metaphor in Ephesians refers to the universal church, but he maintains that the multi-ethnic aspect of the universal church needs to be reflected in the local church.[28] Likewise Stevens argues that what is true for the universal church must be true for the local church, leaving no room in either for "homogeneity of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, gender, language, or cultural background."[29]

I affirm that the local church is supposed to be, to some extent, a microcosm of the universal church. Stevens is correct to recognize that the biblical authors do not always make hard and fast distinctions between the universal and local church, because the latter is simply the geographic expression of the former. Certainly he is also correct to remind readers not to be free floating Christians who are connected only to the universal church without an association to a local congregation.

But one has a flawed ecclesiology if he does not also recognize some areas of discontinuity between the universal and the local church. I will mention four points where the local church is not a pure reflection of the universal church. First, the universal church extends to the past, present and future, but the local church is inherently time-bound. Second, the universal church extends to all locations, but the local church is inherently geographically based. No one opposes the idea of separating on Sunday if two congregations are fifty miles apart. Yet I suggest that cultural distance is just as real as geographic distance, even if two churches are in close proximity.

Here Paul declares that he, while writing from Ephesus, is a part of the same body as his readers, who are in Corinth. Clearly the universal church is his subject. Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate claim that two separate mono-ethnic churches in the same area betray the unity of the church, but this claim overlooks that the unity in view often relates to the universal church.

[28]Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding," 207-8.

[29]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 127.

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Third, the universal church is not bound by a building; the local church normally is. The universal church will never have limited seating capacity. If a local church outgrows its current location and plants another church a few miles away, this is successful, kingdom growth. But this multiplication effort actually runs against the grain of the multi-ethnic mandate's emphasis on unity. While I have not come across any proponent of the multi-ethnic mandate who is opposed to church planting (except mono-ethnic church planting), some of these authors fail to see what happens if their understanding of church unity is taken to its logical conclusion. If the oneness of the church directly corresponds to worshipping together each week, then all churches in a city need to worship together each week. Otherwise, there is division, and division prevents the church from having visible unity, one must conclude.

But clearly this conclusion is untenable. Surely churches can grow and divide in the same area without betraying God's ideal; otherwise church planting in the same city would be wrong. If churches can divide when they outgrow their current building, what is so different about having a Hispanic congregation a few miles away from an African American congregation? If Paul's reference to the church being "one body" (Eph 4:4) means all people who are a part of this body have to worship together each week, then two separate churches that are both multi-ethnic are even unacceptable. The reality is that the kingdom of God has expanded to such an extent in most American cities and towns that division is necessary for space reasons, and this division does not conflict with the NT call for unity.

Fourth, the universal church speaks multiple languages; local churches normally do not.[30] This divergence is another point of discontinuity between the

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[30]Appendix 1 points out that some authors who advocate for the multi-ethnic mandate argue that individual congregations must be multi-lingual. Other proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate believe that division along lines of language is acceptable. Those who believe churches must be multi-ethnic and multi-lingual are at least consistent, but this position is problematic. When Christians sing songs in a language they do not know, they may be demonstrating solidarity with their fellow believers, but it seems

universal church and the local church. Stevens may be correct to argue that the link between the universal church and local church is "inseparable,"[31] but that truth does not make them identical. It is therefore improper to conclude that whatever is true of the universal church must be true of the local church. The local and universal church differ in terms of time, space, and language, and they may also differ on ethnic diversity without compromising a proper understanding of the catholicity of the church.[32] What is true of the universal church does not necessarily have to be true of the local church.

difficult to see how this practice benefits their souls. Paul admonishes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). Can it be said that God's word is dwelling "richly" and that God's word is "in your hearts" if the words being taught, prayed or sung are in a language foreign to the hearer? DeYmaz's church normally does not translate non-English prayers (DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 104). But how does this practice build up those in the church who do not understand what is being prayed? Translation through headsets or from the stage is possible, but does not this create barriers to learning? While those who support multi-lingual services can be applauded for their consistency in affirming that all barriers—cultural and linguistic—must be overcome within the same church, these multi-lingual congregations face unnecessary challenges regarding evangelism and discipleship. Paul's recognition that prophecy is superior to tongues demonstrates how important it is for everyone to understand what is going on in a public gathering (1 Cor 14:1-25).

       Therefore, churches that are willing to divide along language lines have a better grasp of the priority of clear communication in church settings. The idea that a church may unite around a language but not around a culture is, however, inherently unstable. A bifurcation between language and culture fails to recognize the symbiotic relationship between the two. Separate languages give rise to separate cultures, and understanding a language is significant to understanding a culture. Thus, language and culture simply represent different degrees of separation.

       Even though I believe it is certainly permissible for churches to split along language lines, the point I wish to make is that the "multi-ethnic but language-specific" position has cherry-picked what kind of diversity all churches must have (ethnic diversity) while accepting what kind of diversity churches cannot handle (linguistic diversity). In the end this is a decision made on pragmatic grounds, not theological conviction, and this decision seems to conflict with the theology previously presented by proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate. These authors maintain that biblical "oneness" means all believers must worship together. But then they deny this logic when they allow for language specific gatherings. They want passages that talk about Christian unity to call for multi-ethnicity, but then they make exceptions to their own hermeneutic as they see fit. In effect the multi-ethnic, language-specific church is saying, "The whole Bible calls the church to be multi-ethnic, but if that becomes really difficult because of language barriers, it is okay to worship separately." The inconsistency of this position is self-evident. See Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 238, for his explanation of why his church offers language-specific gatherings.

[31]David Stevens, "Multi-Ethnicity, the Moon and the Local Church," *Unity in Christ Magazine* (January 31, 2011), accessed April 6, 2012, http://unityinchristmagazine.com/theology/multi-ethnicity-the-moon-and-the-local-church/.

[32]See also my response to the heaven argument below, which develops a similar argument.

Unity and the Common Gospel

Stevens recognizes that believers in Rome worshipped in separate house churches. He even acknowledges that these individual house churches may have divided along homogeneous lines. But he cites Paul's words in Romans 15:5-6 to claim that the apostle wants these separate groups to come together as one congregation: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."[33] Stevens seems to understand Paul's reference to "one heart" and "one mouth" to mean the apostle wants all his readers to be able to worship God together in the same context, not in separate house churches.[34]

The problem with Stevens' understanding of Romans 15:5-6 is that he seems to miss Paul's allusion to conversion. Previously Paul states that man confesses "Jesus is Lord" with his *mouth* and believes in his *heart* that God raised Jesus from the dead (10:9-10).[35] For Paul, the mouth and the heart are the mechanisms of salvation. Therefore, Paul's reference to worshipping with one heart and one mouth in 15:5-6 is nothing more than a call for Christian worship to be gospel-centered. To find an instruction in the text for house churches to band together with other house churches stretches the text beyond the author's intent.

The soteriological backdrop of Romans 15:5-6 reveals that the essence of Christian unity is that believers affirm the same gospel. Paul highlights this theme again

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[33]This translation is the NIV (1984).

[34]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 135. Stevens does not speculate how often this corporate worship should take place or how the government or organization of the individual house churches compares to how the city-wide gathering is organized. Was the larger gathering of multiple house churches supposed to meet weekly? Did participants hear separate preaching then come together for corporate singing? Did they sit under common teaching then separate to observe the Lord's Supper in the house church setting? Were the leaders at the house church level automatically recognized in the larger gathering? Stevens does not explore these questions, but he maintains that Paul's intention is for some sort of gathering beyond the house church level to happen in Rome.

[35]Paul uses the same word for "mouth" in 10:9 and 15:6 (στόμα) but different words for "heart"— καρδία (10:9) versus ὁμοθυμαδὸν (15:6), which can be rendered "with one mind."

in Ephesians 4:4-6. In rapid succession Paul reminds his readers of the importance of being "one." His references to "one hope . . . one faith . . . [and] one baptism" are references to the common salvation all believers share. Again, the essence of Christian oneness is not worshipping alongside people who are ethnically different from oneself. The essence of Christian unity is affirming the same gospel and being saved by the same faith. Even Christians who worship in separate churches can be united by the gospel. To read into Paul's words in Romans 15:5-6 and Ephesians 4:4-6 a call for multi-ethnicity is to miss the apostle's primary point—that all believers have the same way of salvation.

Unity and Spiritual Gifts

A passage similar to Ephesians 4:1-16 is 1 Corinthians 12:1-31. Both texts highlight unity-in-diversity in the church, and both texts are utilized by advocates of the multi-ethnic mandate to support their point.[36] But a simple observation about the context of both passages will show that drawing conclusions about ethnic diversity in the church (again) misses one of Paul's main points. Both passages declare the oneness of the church in light of the various spiritual gifts within the church. In Ephesians 4, the spiritual gifts seem primarily to relate to church leaders; in 1 Corinthians 12 the spiritual gifts relate to the whole church. Yes, these texts demonstrate that churches are to be composed of unity-in-diversity. But the contexts here refer to the multiplicity of spiritual gifts, not multiplicity of ethnicities. Commenting on Ephesians 4:7, Arnold expounds, "Paul now transitions from speaking of the unity of the body to describing it in terms of its diversity. But this diversity has nothing to do with the various ethnicities, backgrounds, and natural talents of the individual members. It has to do with Christ's sovereign distribution of divine gifts and abilities among the different members."[37]

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[36]For instance, see Terriel R. Byrd, *I Shall Not Be Moved: Racial Separation in Christian Worship* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 16.

[37]Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament,

This discussion has shown that the NT is very serious about Christian unity, but when it speaks of Christian unity or the catholicity of the church, the reader cannot import ethnic diversity into the passage. Defenders of the multi-ethnic mandate essentially argue, "The Bible tells us the church is one; therefore, the church must be multi-ethnic." But this sentence is simply a statement that pretends to be an argument. One could just as easily argue, "The church is one; therefore, there should not be any denominations." Or, "The church is one; therefore, each congregation must follow the same lectionary." These statements simply do not follow. Similarly, one cannot require ethnic diversity in a church based on the unity and catholicity of the church. Again and again the passages that explain the unity of the church do not focus on ethnic diversity. Instead, the biblical authors are making a point about spiritual gifts, the gospel itself, Christian harmony or the universal church.[38]

A Response to the Jew/Gentile Argument

The Jew/Gentile argument can be summarized in one sentence: *Jews and Gentiles are now united because of what Christ has accomplished; therefore, different ethnicities need to be united in the church today*. The goal of this section is to evaluate this claim.

The previous chapter offered four foundations or expressions of Jew/Gentile unity: the atonement, Paul's mystery, the no-distinction passages, and Jew/Gentile table

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vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 2010), 243.

[38]For a more complete understanding of church unity in the NT, readers should consider the relationship between a local house church and the city-wide church. The churches in Ephesus, Rome and Jerusalem were likely too large for all the believers to meet in one location, so they spread out into various house churches. But Scripture still refers to the singular church in Jerusalem and Ephesus and the oneness of the church in Rome. Therefore, it appears first-century Christians often retained a city-wide concept of church unity, despite the fact that they met separately. This is significant to the current debate over the multi-ethnic mandate because it reveals that the NT command to be unified does not necessarily mean believers have to worship in the same congregation each week. Biblical unity can exist at the house church level and the city-wide level. This model opens the possibility of various ethnic-specific congregations still being able to experience biblical unity while retaining a high form of contextualization. See appendix 2, "A City-Wide Concept of Church Unity."

fellowship. While these arguments relied on different texts, they each arrive at the same

conclusion, that Jews and Gentiles are now one. The goal of this section is not to dispute

the idea that Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ. I agree that what Christ

accomplished in the atonement, the nature of Paul's mystery,[39] the clarity of the no-

distinction passages, and the practical expression of table fellowship effectively show that

the NT calls Jews and Gentiles to be one. The question then is "what is the nature of

Jew/Gentile unity?"

If Jew/Gentile oneness simply means that Jews and Gentiles both affirm the

same gospel and have the same Lord, then such unity does not have to be expressed at the

local church level. Indeed, some scholars hold out the possibility that Jewish and Gentile

Christians gathered in separate house churches. In support of the HUP, Wagner argues

that early house churches remained divided along Jew/Gentile lines.[40] But even scholars

who have no compelling interest in defending the HUP find evidence that Jews and

Gentiles in the first century worshipped separately. F. F. Bruce suggests that Christians

in Rome worshipped primarily in Jewish or Gentile contexts.[41] Polhill also suggests that

Christians in Rome gathered in separate house churches that "may have been

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[39]While the proceeding grants that the Pauline mystery shows that Jew/Gentile unity was part of God's design all along, this is not to say that DeYmaz's explanation and application of the "mystery of the gospel" is entirely accurate. DeYmaz's chapter on the Pauline mystery suffers from reducing the mystery entirely to Gentile inclusion (DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 27-42). He equates Paul's mystery with building a multi-ethnic church so much that the reader wonders if he is simply trying to read his thesis back into the text. Paul's mystery is primarily about Christ. In Eph 3:4, Paul testifies that he has had an "insight into the mystery of Christ." Paul received the mystery, and on the Damascus Road he received a revelation directly about Christ. Gentile salvation is certainly a key component of his Christological vision, but it is not the whole. O'Brien's clarification about Paul's mystery in Eph 3 is a fitting critique of DeYmaz's reductionistic reading of the same passage: "It is inadequate to claim that the content of the mystery in Ephesians is defined solely in terms of God's acceptance of the Gentiles and their union with Jews on an equal footing in Christ" (Peter O'Brien, "Mystery," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne et al. [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994], 623). Altogether, DeYmaz seems to have zoomed in so much on an *implication* of the mystery (Gentile inclusion) that he has overlooked that the mystery is about Christ himself—the long-awaited Messiah.

[40]See Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 129.

[41]See F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 394.

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segregated."[42] Arnold also holds out the possibility that house churches in Asia Minor

segregated along ethnic lines.[43] Even Prill, who advocates for multi-ethnic churches,

acknowledges that the division in Acts 6 between Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews suggests

that these two different groups of Christians in Jerusalem had their own leaders and held

their own meetings.[44]

While separate house churches for Jews and Gentiles remain a distinct

possibility, it is unlikely that a compelling case can be made from the NT that most

churches took on this structure. More importantly, even if particular churches were

Jewish-only or Gentile-only, a strong case can be made that this sort of division is not

what the apostles wanted. Just because they existed, that does not necessarily mean

churches today should imitate them.

In light of the evidence presented in the previous chapter, the two examples of

Jew/Gentile table fellowship (the verdict of the Jerusalem Council and Paul's

confrontation of Peter in Gal 2) persuasively show that Jew/Gentile oneness extends to

the local church level. Concerning the Jerusalem Council, three of the four guidelines

given by the apostles relate to Jewish food sensitivities (Acts 15:20). The most likely

motive for giving these instructions on what to eat is that the leaders in Jerusalem are

trying to preserve Jew/Gentile table fellowship.[45] Concerning Paul confronting Peter,

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[42]John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 280. Polhill primarily has Jew/Gentile divisions in mind.

[43]Arnold, *Ephesians*, 174.

[44]Thorsten Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 (October 2009): 334-36. Even if the seven Greek men had a unique role over Greeks in the church in Jerusalem, the apostles were still over the entire church.

[45]Witherington offers an alternative and compelling proposal of the nature of the four-fold verdict of the Jerusalem Council. Witherington does not think that Jew/Gentile table fellowship in the church is the proper backdrop for the decree. Instead, he points out that feasts at pagan temples bind together the four commands. Sexual immorality is forbidden in the decree. Many have been puzzled over how such an instruction relates to dietary commands and idolatry, but feasts at pagan temples were places where each of these four commands (including sexual immorality) were broken. In this interpretation, the apostles are not instructing Gentiles to make concessions to conservative Jews. Instead they are giving the

there seems to be no way of reading Galatians 2:11-14 and hanging on to the idea that Jewish-only and Gentile-only churches were acceptable in Antioch. When Peter reverts back to a homogeneous environment, Paul rebukes him for denying the gospel. For Paul, this unity needed to be visible in local churches.

Returning now to the thesis under examination: *Jews and Gentiles are now united because of what Christ has accomplished; therefore, different ethnicities must be united in the church today*. The argumentation that follows agrees with the first half of this statement. I accept and rejoice in the truths that Christ united Jews and Gentiles through his blood, that the mystery now revealed emphasizes Gentile inclusion, that Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 declare the reality of Jew/Gentile oneness, and that Jew/Gentile table fellowship leaves little doubt that this unity needs to be expressed at the local level.

My aim is to challenge the second half of the statement—*therefore, different ethnicities must be united in the church today*. I hope to demonstrate that Jew/Gentile unity in the NT context does not mean local churches today need to be multi-ethnic. The pressing question, then, is "to what extent do Jews and Gentiles in the NT correspond to ethnic distinctions today?" I will show that ethnicities today do not correspond in a one-to-one way to Jews and Gentiles in the NT. Often the proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate simply assume that there is a necessary relationship between these two groups. Jews and Gentiles are in the same church in Scripture, therefore Koreans and Latinos need to be in the same church today, they reason, but they often do so without even trying

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timeless command not to participate with idolatry (Witherington, *Acts*, 460-67). Witherington makes a strong case, and this interpretation is appealing because it makes sense out of why the decree prohibited what it did. If Witherington is correct, the Jerusalem Council has very little to say about the multi-ethnic mandate because the setting behind the decree does not relate to the cultural/religious differences between Jewish and Gentile believer. However, the remainder of this paper will proceed with the more common interpretation—that the apostles are creating a compromise between Jewish and Gentile Christians—because 15:21 implies that sensitivity to Jewish scruples are in view, and because the subsequent reference to the Jerusalem Council in 21:25 provides an ecclesial setting where the Jewish Christian attachment to the Law is in view.

to build a bridge between first-century and the modern contexts. For instance, Woo writes, "The truth is that the blood of Christ demolished the dividing wall between Jew and Greek, between black and white, and between any other lines of demarcation that have separated humanity."[46] Here he directly correlates the Jew/Greek divide to the black/white divide. He seems to see them in a one-to-one relationship. Similarly, J. Daniel Hays explains, "The ethnic-based tension between Jews and Samaritans in the first century is analogous to the ethnic-based tensions between Blacks and Whites in North America today."[47] Here Hays simply states that the relationship between Jews and Samaritans is analogous to ethnic strife today; he does not prove his case. Richard Hays acknowledges that the Jew/Gentile divide is different than ethnic divides today, yet he maintains that "the New Testament's treatment of the relation between Jew and Greek unavoidably becomes a paradigm for the Christian response to ethnic and racial divisions of all sorts."[48] Each of these efforts state that the Jew/Gentile (or Jew/Samaritan) divide resembles ethnic divides today, but these authors simply declare that there is a relationship between these categories. They do not actually prove that such a correspondence actually exists.

Metzger is aware that one needs to be cautious in moving from text to context:

While it is important to guard against reading into the New Testament an American segregationist-integrationist perspective on race, the New Testament's focus on how God in Christ reconciles alienated social groups (such as Israel and the nations) does shed light on present-day conflicts between peoples, including racial and economic tensions.[49]

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[46]R. Alan Streett, "An Interview with Rodney Woo," *Criswell Theological Review* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 83.

[47]J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003), 204.

[48]R. B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 409.

[49]Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 77.

Even though a direct parallel may not exist, the effort toward Jew/Gentile unity is instructive for a world today marked by ethnic separation.

The more thoughtful proponents of multi-ethnic churches understand the need to connect the cultural dots. Piper maintains the Jew/Gentile divide "was as intractable as any ethnic hostilities we experience today." Piper asserts the divide was religious (Jews and Gentiles had different faiths). It was cultural and social (Jews and Gentiles had different diets, observed different holidays, and had different cleanliness standards), and it was racial (Jews and Gentiles had different ancestries). Piper concludes, "So the divide here was as big, or bigger, than any divide that we face today among Anglo-, African-, Latino-, Asian-, or Native-American."[50] Here Piper senses the need to prove the connection between Jew/Gentile relations and modern ethnic relations, and he appeals to religious, cultural and ethnic categories to make his case.

It is understandable why many naturally see a parallel between the Jew/Gentile struggle and historical struggles between ethnic groups. Piper is right in his comment above to highlight several parallels related to food, holidays, and having a sense of a common heritage. These traits *are* part of what distinguish one ethnic group from another. I affirm that there are similarities between what separates some ethnic groups today and what separated Jews and Gentiles in the first century.

But these similarities, however, are not decisive in the end. They do not build a strong enough link between the NT situation and the contemporary scene to defend the multi-ethnic mandate. In other words, even though the struggle for Jews and Gentiles to get along resonates with the struggle of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, these parallels do not build an essential relationship between the biblical text and the modern context.

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[50]John Piper, *Bloodlines*: *Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 126. It could be that some advocates for the multi-ethnic mandate have some of Piper's reasons in the back of their minds when they link the Jew/Gentile divide to ethnic divisions today.

I will support this claim by drawing attention to four ways Jew/Gentile relations are dissimilar to modern ethnic relations. First, "Jew" and "Gentile" are not primarily ethnic terms. Second, Jews and Gentiles in the NT may not have always been as culturally distant as some writers assume. Third, Jew/Gentile divisions were rooted in the law covenant unlike modern ethnic divisions. Fourth, Jewish Christians in the NT struggled to accept Gentile salvation, which has no parallel in the modern church landscape. These points of discontinuity will show that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between modern ethnic strife and Jew/Gentile strife. The presence of Jews and Gentiles in the same churches in the NT does not, therefore, mean that all churches need to strive to be as ethnically diverse as their communities.

"Jew" and "Gentile"
Not Primarily Ethnic Terms

This first point is rather obvious and serves as prolegomenon, but seeing this point from Scripture helps pave the way for the following arguments. Several passages show that "Jew" and "Gentile" are not strictly ethnic terms; they are primarily religious designations. The story of Pentecost records Diaspora Jews gathering in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Luke describes those present as "men of Judea" (Acts 2:14), "Men of Israel" (2:22; 3:12), and "brothers" (2:37). But these descriptions do not mean that Pentecost happened in a homogeneous environment.[51] Luke mentions how participants came from all over the Mediterranean (2:5-13). They clearly spoke different languages, and the giving of the Spirit is authenticated by the members' abilities to understand one another in their native tongue. Thus, Pentecost involved only Jews, but it was also a multi-ethnic event. Therefore, "Jew" was not necessarily an ethnic designation, because Jews in the first century were spread out across the Mediterranean

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[51]See Thorsten Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 (October 2009): 333-34.

world. As Asia Minor became more and more Hellenized, Diaspora Jews grew more and more culturally distant from their kinsmen in Israel.[52] To be a "Jew" was to be in covenant with the God of Israel. It was first a religious designation.

In the same way, "Gentile" is not simply an ethnic term. A Gentile is simply a non-Jew, so there is massive ethnic diversity within this term. No Greek in the ancient world would have thought "I'm a Gentile." Stanley aptly states how the Jew/Gentile dichotomy reflects a Jewish worldview only: "Those whom the Jews lumped together as 'Gentiles' would have defined themselves as 'Greeks', 'Romans', 'Phyrgians', 'Galatians', 'Cappadocians', and members of various other ethnic populations."[53] Paul even refers to believing Gentiles as "formerly Gentiles" (1 Cor 12:2).[54] Paul is not trying to say that the Gentile believers in Corinth somehow divested themselves of their ethnic identity at conversion. His point is that these Greeks are no longer living in sin apart from Christ, and the word he used to describe this spiritual darkness is "Gentile." Hence, "Jew" and "Gentile" primarily reflect spiritual categories, not just ethnic categories.

Why is this important? Because seeing the primarily religious nature of these terms shows that someone cannot simply substitute "black/white" when he reads "Jew/Gentile" or "Jew/Greek." Doing so confuses categories. Yet this conflation happens in the multi-ethnic literature. For example, Metzger quotes Gordon Fee, who writes that churches cannot allow the "old distinctions between bond and free (or Jew and Greek, or male and female)" to persist in the new age. As Metzger quotes this statement, he inserts "[or black and white, rich and poor]" after Fee's reference to male and

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[52]Christopher D. Stanley, "'Neither Jew Nor Greek': Ethnic Conflict in Graeco-Roman Society," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1966): 112.

[53]Ibid., 105.

[54]Charles H. Cosgrove, "Did Paul Value Ethnicity?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2006): 277-78. Cosgrove notes that the KJV helpfully translates this construction "formerly heathen."

female.[55] So while Fee sticks to the biblical categories of Jew/Greek and male/female

(cf. the no-distinction passage), Metzger adds in the categories he wants to see

incorporated into the church.[56] Metzger literally adds to Fee's statement to demonstrate

that, in his mind, the Jew/Greek divide corresponds directly to ethnic divides today.

Hence, there is a burden of proof on those who use Jew/Gentile unity to defend

the multi-ethnic mandate. Advocates need to demonstrate *how* the Jew/Gentile situation

is similar enough to modern ethnic differences to warrant the association. The next point

aims to explore the nature of Jew/Gentile relations in the first century.

Jews and Gentiles Not Always
Culturally Distant

Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate have an interest in showing that Jews

and Gentiles were very far apart culturally. If the NT shows that the church can bridge

the gap between Jews and Gentiles who were cultural opposites, then surely it can

overcome any ethnic differences today.[57] Williams provides a good example of this

approach. Having shown that Jews and Gentiles are now reconciled to each other in

Christ, he reminds his readers how crossing this hurdle was bigger than the more recent

ethnic hurdles America has faced: "In general, hatred between Jews and Gentiles was

fierce and reciprocal in the ancient world. In many respects, it was more vitriolic than the

hatred that African-Americans and Caucasians have expressed toward one another in the

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[55]Metzger, *Consuming Jesus*, 60-61.

[56]Here is the full context of the quotation as found in Metzger: "As Fee says, 'No "church" can long endure as the people of God for the new age in which the old distinctions between bond and free (or Jew and Greek, or male and female [or black and white, rich and poor]) are allowed to persist. Especially so at the Table, where Christ, who has made us one, has ordained that we should visibly proclaim that unity' (p. 544; bracketed material added)" (ibid). See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 544.

[57]So, Piper, *Bloodlines*, 126. Stevens makes a similar case as Piper. He stresses that Jew/Gentile relations in the first century highlight some of the most extensive cultural divides of Paul's day: "They dressed differently, ate differently, worshipped differently, and thought differently" (Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 99).

United States since the days of slavery."[58] My purpose here is to examine if first-century

Jew/Gentile relations really were this extreme, and I intend to argue that the cultural

distance between first-century Jews and Gentiles is sometimes overstated by proponents

of the multi-ethnic mandate.[59]

        Williams attempts to show how much Jews and Gentiles disliked each other.

He cites contemporary and ancient authors to document his case.[60] But his first source is

D. R. de Lacey's article "Gentiles," which states,

> The conventional picture (based on comments by writers such as Juvenal and
> Seneca) is that Jews were perceived as arrogant and foolish: they refused to work on
> the Sabbath (which was a sign of laziness); they circumcised their sons (which was
> revolting); they had strict food laws and they kept to themselves and rejected the
> gods (which was misanthropy).[61]

Williams uses this reference to show that the normal picture of Jew/Gentile relations is

one marked by animosity.[62] The problem with this assertion is that it is the opposite of

what de Lacey claims. After mentioning the "conventional view," de Lacey clarifies in

the very next sentence, "It is most unlikely that this was either the official view or even a

common one."[63] De Lacey goes on to show that Gentiles often treated Jews favorably.

Jews achieved high levels of influence with the state. While some mislabeled them as

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[58]Jarvis J. Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 122.

[59]Here I do not wish to gloss over the reality that real factors separated Jews and Gentiles. Certainly there were differences, and these differences impacted their respective identities. According to Stanley, "There is ample evidence to indicate that both 'Jews' and 'Greeks' regarded themselves as distinct 'ethnic groups' within the broader Graeco-Roman world" (Stanley, "Neither Jew Nor Greek," 111).

[60]Williams, *One New Man*, 123-26.

[61]D. R. de Lacey, "Gentiles," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 335.

[62]In a footnote Williams acknowledges that de Lacey is not giving his own analysis, but the net result of Williams' citations of de Lacey is to give the reader the sense that Jews and Gentiles of antiquity always had strained relations, which is the opposite of what de Lacey argues. See Williams, *One New Man*, 123.

[63]de Lacey, "Gentiles," 335.

atheists, many others were drawn to the "lofty ideals which they saw in Judaism."[64] The recent trend in scholarship shows a shift in how scholars are summarizing Jewish attitudes toward Gentiles. The traditional view is that Jews viewed all things Greek with hostility. But the latest research emphasizes ways Jews were tolerant of Hellenistic culture. De Lacey suggests Paul's frequent use of athletic metaphors and his willingness to quote from Greek sources may reflect that the current approach to understanding Jew/Gentile relations is the better one.[65]

Others support de Lacey's conclusion. A responsible reconstruction shows that Jew/Gentile relations, though sometimes strained, were also complex and often reflected high levels of peaceful interactions.[66] Some of the differences between Jews and Greeks would not have been readily apparent. The distinguishing mark of circumcision was obviously hidden, and it is possible that not all male Diaspora Jews were circumcised.[67] S. J. D. Cohen agrees that Jews and Greeks held much in common: "Not a single ancient author says that Jews are distinctive because of their looks, clothing, speech, names, or occupation."[68] Some "Jews" were Greek converts to Judaism who did not share a common history with their Hebraic Jews. Other Jews neglected the Torah and were assimilated into Greek culture. Local politics also served to integrate

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[64]Ibid., 336.

[65]Ibid.

[66]It must be acknowledged that any attempt to reconstruct ancient Jew/Gentile relations is partial. A proper examination of attitudes between the two groups needs to distinguish between the perception of Jews in Israel and Jews of the Diaspora. Also, the extant literature from Seneca, Juvenal and Josephus may not reflect common attitudes that governed daily interaction (de Lacey, "Gentiles," 335). See also Martin Hengel, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians: Aspects of the Hellenization of Judaism in the Pre-Christian Period,* trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark,1996); and Erich S. Gruen's *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2002).

[67]Stanley, "Neither Jew Nor Greek," 112.

[68]Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 28.

non-Greeks into Hellenistic culture. Greek cities often had systemic shortages in Greeks available to fill key political positions. Eventually non-Greeks, generally second or third generation "barbarians," were allowed to occupy these vacancies. Intermarriage also made the boundary between Greeks and non-Greeks rather fluid. Even in cities where Jews and Greeks lived in separate areas, commerce required these two groups to interact regularly.[69]

Barclay's careful research supports the possibility of high Jewish assimilation. He divides Diaspora Jews into two categories—those in Egypt, where extant documents are large enough to draw firmer conclusions, and those throughout the rest of the Roman world, where the data is more partial. In each group he shows how various Jews would have achieved high, medium, or low levels of assimilation with the majority culture. For example, in Egypt a Jew could have found himself in many life settings that led to high assimilation. Such assimilation would have been the case for politically active Jews, Jews interested in climbing the social ladder, Jews who married Gentiles and did not raise their children in Judaism, Jews who criticized Judaism, Jews who heavily allegorized portions of their own Law, and Jews who were isolated from other Jews. Barclay cites examples of each of these occurring.[70] This research confirms that Jew/Greek relations were not monolithic, and Jews were often significantly integrated into Hellenistic life.

Having surveyed several of the significant scholars in early Jewish culture, Hansen offers the following summary:

> Barclay, Esler and Cohen all have demonstrated that despite well-entrenched boundaries that ensured their perseverance as an ethnic group, the Jews of antiquity

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[69]Stanley, "Neither Jew Nor Greek," 112-16.

[70]Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* , 103-12. Medium levels of assimilation occurred in Egypt when Jews were active in the court system, military, were well-educated and had active social lives in Alexandria. Jews who were employed by non-Jews, and Jews who were in legal and business relationships with non-Jews also experienced medium levels of assimilation (112-17). Jews who experienced low assimilation in Egypt were those who lived in Jewish residential areas, and Jews who were the recipients of persecution (117-19). See also Barclay's analysis of high, medium and low levels of assimilation throughout the rest of the Roman world (320-32).

participated robustly in their social contexts culturally, intellectually, economically, politically and militarily. As Barth has observed, ethnic boundaries do not prohibit social interaction so much as they channel and structure it.[71]

Jews were not always outcasts in the Greek world, nor Greeks in the Jewish world. Jews, although in the minority, did not live on the proverbial wrong side of the tracks. Instead, they were part of the Roman culture. Social interaction was high, meaning the cultural distance was not always extreme.

Not only did the interplay between Jews and Greeks often reduce the cultural distance between the two groups, but it even influenced their spiritual outlooks. Arnold offers a snapshot of this dual influence in his examination on spiritual warfare. He reminds, "It is very important to remember that a very thin line separated Jewish and gentile religious belief in many quarters during the first century."[72] Unlike the Judaism of much of the OT, the Judaism of the first century had been affected by centuries of Hellenistic culture. Jews dabbled in magic and astrology like their Gentile neighbors.[73] Yet the influence cuts both ways; Judaism influenced the prevailing worldviews among Gentiles.

One example of such influence is how the names of Solomon, Yahweh and names of Jewish angels are set alongside Hekate, Helios, Serapis as well as other Greek and Asian gods in magical incantations.[74] "It is thus very difficult to separate what is 'Jewish' and what is 'Hellenistic' when the topic of good and evil spirits is approached," Arnold clarifies. So when Paul refers to the powers, he is referring to notions common in

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[71]Bruce Hansen, *'All of You Are One': The Social Vision of Gal 3.28, 1 Cor 12.13 and Col 3.11*, ed. Mark Goodacre (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 56. See also Hengel, *Jews, Greek, and Barbarians,* 101.

[72]Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 91.

[73]Ibid., 19-54.

[74]Ibid., 91.

both Greek culture and Jewish apocalyptic literature.[75] Hence, the spiritual world of Jew

and Greeks rubbed off on each other.

The point I have tried to make so far is that the cultural, economic, political

and even spiritual worlds of first-century Jews and Greeks often intersected with each

other and influenced each other over time. The Jews of the Diaspora normally had been

away from the homeland of Israel for centuries at the time the NT was written. Thus,

there was ample time for Jews to assimilate into the broader culture. There was time for

cultural experiences to be shared, customs to be learned, and perspectives to be

understood.

The challenge now becomes relating this information to the ethnic differences

that divide churches today. When someone immigrates to America from the heartland of

Africa or from a rural village in the Far East, the cultural distance between that individual

and the majority culture is normally very wide. By the time this individual has

grandchildren, the cultural distance between his descendants' culture and mainstream

American culture is usually narrower. The point of the above analysis on Jew/Gentile

interactions in the first century is to show that readers cannot assume that the Jews and

Gentiles spoken of in Scripture were always traversing huge cultural gaps in their

interactions. One may not assume that Jews were like the grandfather who just came

through Ellis Island a week ago. Often, it seems, they were like the grandchildren that

grew up knowing they were different than the mainstream, yet still understanding and

feeling comfortable in the mainstream—even being affected by the mainstream culture in

many ways, and influencing it in return.

The NT even provides some key evidence to confirm the fluidity of

Jew/Gentile interactions. Paul's missionary journeys testify to the very fact that Jews and

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[75]G. H. Twelftree, "Spiritual Powers," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 801.

(some) Greeks were culturally similar enough to worship together prior to exercising faith in Christ. When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Iconium, they entered a "*Jewish* synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both *Jews and Greeks* believed" (Acts 14:1). Luke states the obvious point that the missionaries preached in a "Jewish" synagogue, yet their audience consisted of both Jews and Greeks. Jews and Greeks regularly worshipped at the synagogue together in Iconium. Whatever cultural distance was between them was apparently not big enough to cause them to want to worship in separate synagogues (which occasionally happened, cf. 6:9). Moreover, some Jews and Greeks were united in their opposition to the gospel in 14:5. The gospel was not accepted by one group and rejected by another, which may have been the case if these groups were defined by stark cultural differences. Instead, some from both parties believed, and some from both groups rejected the apostles' message. The same scenario is repeated when Paul arrives in the cosmopolitan city of Corinth. Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks" (18:4). Again, Jews and Gentiles were worshipping together *prior* to the preaching of the gospel.

The previous chapter summarizes how supporters of the multi-ethnic mandate interpret Ephesians 2:11-22. For them this text is foundational for multi-ethnicity in the church, for it showcases the rich possibilities of ethnic integration now afforded to the church because of Christ's shed blood. But Acts 14 and 18 reveal that many Jews and Gentiles already worshipped together in synagogues before Jesus atoned for sins. Thus, when Paul writes his letters and refers to Jews and Gentiles being one, he is referring to Jews and Gentiles who are already in the church. And from where did most of them come? The above evidence from Acts suggests they primarily were converts from Paul's evangelism in synagogues. So the Greeks now filling the early church were Greeks who previously were attracted to Judaism. This helps explain why Paul could frequently appeal to the OT in his letters addressed largely to Greeks, because these particular

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Greeks were drawn to Judaism before the gospel came to them. This observation is pivotal. The very Jews and Greeks whom Paul instructs to have table fellowship—not only did the broader cultural trends provide occasion to bring the two cultures closer—but their religious context prior to faith in Christ was already "multi-ethnic." Hence, creating a church with both Jews and Gentiles would likely not have faced some of the same challenges that cause churches to separate today.

None of this analysis is trying to establish that all Gentiles had a natural affinity with all Jews. Certainly there were groups of low assimilation and high opposition. Nor is this analysis trying to establish that Jew/Gentile relations were always easy in the church, even if the church was comprised of Jews and Greeks who previously worshipped together in the synagogue. Nevertheless, the evidence does show that many Jews were assimilated into Hellenistic culture, and that many Greeks were drawn to Judaism. This symbiotic relationship challenges the often cited assumption that Jews and Gentiles experienced the maximum amount of cultural distance possible. This conclusion will hopefully temper the verdicts about multi-ethnicity that are drawn from Jew/Gentile unity.

**Jew/Gentile Divisions Rooted
in the Law Covenant**

The third way Jew/Gentile relations are unlike modern ethnic divisions is that Jew/Gentile relations were grounded in the old covenant. Today's ethnic groups have no parallel. God is the one who distinguished Jews from Gentiles. He is the one who established a special covenant with one group and not the other. The OT called Jews, in many respects, to separate themselves from Gentiles. As the old covenant gave way to the new, God now enters into covenant with Jews and Gentiles both. This massive paradigm shift—accepting Gentiles as full covenant members—is the context into which the NT is written. As the kingdom of God turned on the fulcrum of Christ, it went from

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consisting of Jews only (by and large) to now consisting of Jews plus Gentiles. This covenant-shifting context is important for the debate over the multi-ethnic mandate because many of the passages used to defend the multi-ethnic mandate come from passages that are outlining the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant. Such "covenant shifting" is the context of each of the no-distinction passages (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11) and Eph 2:11-22. It also provides an important background for the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and Paul's confrontation of Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:11-14). My contention here is that these passages are often applied incorrectly to today's ethnic divisions. Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate end up trying to connect cultural/covenantal dots that are simply too far apart. I will use Ephesians 2:11-22 as a case study to draw attention to this misapplication, with a particular focus on Paul's reference to the "dividing wall of hostility" (2:14).

To fully grasp the significance of the transition described in Ephesians 2:11-22, it will be helpful to recall some specifics of the old covenant that separated Jews from Gentiles. Not only were Jews supposed to avoid the Gentile religions and persevere in the worship of the God of Israel, but Jews were to avoid Gentiles themselves in many respects. Upon entering the promised land, Jews were to avoid making covenants with the Gentiles (Exod 23:32). Israelites were not allowed to intermarry with the Canaanites (Deut 7:3), and when it did happen, God called his children to get a divorce (Ezra 9-10). Foreigners who were uncircumcised could not celebrate the Passover (Exod 12:43-49). The Law forbid Jews from charging fellow Jews interest, but they could charge Gentiles interest (Deut 23:19-20). The food restrictions God gave to Israel were meant to make his people set apart (Lev 11:44).[76] Perhaps the clearest form of division and hostility between Jews and Gentiles is God's instruction to Moses and Joshua to overthrow the

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[76]Cf. Deut 14:21: "You shall not eat anything that has died naturally. You may give it to the sojourner who is within your towns, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God."

Gentile nations in the promised land (Deut 20:17). This sampling reminds readers that one of the purposes of the law-covenant was to separate Jews and Gentiles in various ways. While the Mosaic Law did not eliminate all Jew/Gentile interactions, it did limit them extensively.[77]

The separation created by the old covenant is the setting of Ephesians 2:11-22. This passage is littered with covenantal references. Gentiles did not bear the sign of the covenant (2:11), and they did not benefit from the "covenants of promise" (2:12). Christ "is our peace" (2:14) is likely a reference to the Messiah being the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:7).[78] The Gentile readers of Ephesians are reminded that they were once "strangers and aliens" to God's covenant with Israel, but now they are "fellow citizens" (Eph 2:19). The Gentiles did not have the Spirit, but now they do (2:18), and their lives are building blocks in the new temple (2:20-22). These references make the backdrop of the text unmistakable. Paul is showing his readers that those who once were not covenant members now can enter into the covenant.

It is into this covenant context one finds Ephesians 2:14: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh *the dividing wall of hostility*." The final phrase of this verse has become a catch phrase among multi-ethnic church writers who relate Paul's dividing wall to the divisions among different ethnicities today. In *Divided by Faith*, Emerson relates the "dividing walls of hostility" to ethnic tension of all sorts.[79] DeYmaz implies that the dividing wall stands for ethnocentrism

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[77]Stevens accurately reminds readers that some of division between Jews and Gentiles that emerged was not a direct result of stipulations prescribed by Moses but later extrapolations. Several extra-biblical expectations related to Gentiles emerged in Jewish history, which can be found in the Mishnah and Talmud. For example, if a Jew married a Gentile, the family performed a funeral for the Jew to indicate his or her death. Cattle could not be left alone with Gentiles, and a Jew could not help a Gentile woman give birth (Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 102).

[78]Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 194.

[79]Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 54.

and racism,[80] and elsewhere he states that the dividing wall represents the cultural factors that separate people.[81] Woo also has a widened interpretation of Paul's dividing wall: "What Jesus started with His life, He finished with his death. When the blood of Christ broke down the dividing wall between the Jews and the Gentiles (Eph 2:13-14), religious, ethnic, cultural, social, economic, gender, and age barriers were also annihilated."[82] Boyd declares, "Christ on the cross has in fact torn down the racial wall of separation that divided people-groups (Eph. 2:11-22)."[83]

Stevens argues that "the dividing walls of ethnicity have been once and for all deconstructed (Eph 1-3). Therefore, *in our experience* we must deconstruct the walls, never allowing them to be reconstructed."[84] After describing the inscriptions on the wall to the Court of the Gentiles warning them not to enter, Stevens compares the barriers in the modern church to the balustrade.

> Our dividing walls are much more subtle and intangible. It is precisely their subtle, intangible character that makes them so powerful. We allow color, culture, and class, as well as a whole array of human sociological determinants—individualism, status quo bias, and religious consumerism—to regulate the definition of "our kind of people." We certainly never put up a sign stating that trespassers will be executed. We don't need to. In far too many churches, our homogeneity of ethnicity already speaks clearly and loudly of who is "in" and who is "out." What explanation can account for the fact that today a mere 7.5 percent of Christian churches can be classified as ethnically mixed?[85]

These references show that defenders of the multi-ethnic mandate regularly interpret Paul's "dividing wall" in Ephesians 2:14 to refer to modern ethnic divisions. If Christ

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[80]DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 102.

[81]Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 152.

[82]Woo, *The Color of Church*, 19. Cf. 80, 253, 256.

[83]Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 254.

[84]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 98.

[85]Ibid., 104-5.

has removed this dividing wall, the church should not be divided along ethnic lines, they reason. I wish to critique this approach by posing two questions. First, what is the dividing wall in Ephesians 2:14? Second, how does this dividing wall relate to modern ethnic divisions?

Concerning the first question, there have been several interpretations of what this dividing wall is, and they can be placed into three general categories. First, the dividing wall could be a physical barrier. If it is a physical barrier, it could refer to the curtain that formed the boundary of the Holy of Holies. In favor of this view, the dividing wall is uniquely connected to Jesus' death, when the curtain tore from top to bottom in Mark 15:38 (cf. Heb 10:19-20). In opposition to this view, the curtain served to separate Jew from Jew (the high priest from all others), not Jew from Gentile, which is the context in Ephesians 2.

If the dividing wall stands for a physical barrier, a more favorable option is that Paul is referencing the balustrade, the wall in the temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the Jewish court. This wall contained an inscription warning Gentiles not to enter.[86] Therefore, Wright concludes, "The image of the dividing wall is, pretty certainly, taken from the Jerusalem temple, with its sign warning Gentiles to come no further. That has gone in Christ, because in him a new temple is constructed."[87]

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[86]One inscription discovered in 1871 reads, "Let no foreigner enter within the partition and enclosure surrounding the temple. Whoever is arrested will himself be responsible for his death which will follow." A second inscription was discovered in 1935, but it is only partial (quoted in Williams, *One New Man*, 119).

[87]N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 172. In support of this position, Paul has an experience in Jerusalem that confirms the hostility surrounding the temple wall. When Paul appears in the temple, a Jewish mob condemns him for violating the Mosaic Law. The mob had seen Paul earlier with a Gentile, and they assumed the apostle had taken the Gentile into the temple. The mob's accusation causes a stir, which ends in Paul being beaten then arrested (Acts 21:27-36). Two interesting facts possibly connect this incident to Eph 2. First, the Jewish mob consisted of Jews from Asia, not Jerusalem. Second, the man Paul allegedly brought into the temple was Trophimus, an Ephesian. Both observations suggest that Paul's Ephesian audience could have been familiar with the temple wall hundreds of miles away. If this view is correct, modern, western interpreters of Eph 2:14 may find a helpful analogy between the temple wall and the Berlin wall. The division between East and West Germany was a physical barrier that represented two ideologies. As the wall was torn down in 1989, its

Nevertheless, many scholars do not see Paul referring to a physical barrier in Ephesians 2:14. Because the walls in Jerusalem were still standing when Paul wrote Ephesians, Williams does not take Paul to be referring to the balustrade. Why would he speak of it being torn down by his death if it were still standing?[88] Morris also does not view this as the balustrade, though this historical barrier can still be instructive: "It would be too much to say that Paul is writing about this wall. But the wall and its inscription allow us to see something of the depth of the division between Jew and Gentile and that is certainly before us in Ephesians 2."[89]

Second, if Paul's wall were not a physical barrier, some see it as a reference to Gnosticism. This interpretation holds that the wall is dividing the heavenly realm from the earthly realm. The redeemer figure descends to earth to accomplish his mission, breaking through this wall, and then he returns to the heavenly realm, now creating access for man to enter the higher realm. This view finds little support in conservative scholarship. Not only is Gnosticism foreign to the context of Ephesians 2, but Paul is clearly referring to the division between two groups of people. This most naturally refers to a vertical wall, not a horizontal wall between an earthly and heavenly world.[90]

Another way to interpret the dividing wall is to take it as a reference to the Mosaic Law. This approach fits the context the best. Christ tears down the "dividing wall of hostility *by abolishing the law of commandments* expressed in ordinances" (Eph 2:14b-15a). If the dividing wall were removed by the removal of the Law, then the dividing wall and the Law most naturally stand in apposition. The dividing wall is the Law with its commandments and ordinances. Thus, atonement creates fellowship

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destruction symbolized the re-uniting of two people (Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians*, in vol. 11 of *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 145-46).

[88]Williams, *One New Man*, 119-20.

[89]Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 143.

[90]See Martin, *Ephesians*, 146, for a summary of this view.

between Jew and Gentile by removing what stood between them—the old covenant and the Mosaic Law that supported it.

How did the death of Christ effect such Jew/Gentile unity? By removing the laws, particularly the ceremonial rules, that separated Jews from Gentiles.[91] When Christ died, God no longer imposed on Jews the rules that once separated them from Gentiles. The purpose of those aspects of the law has now been fulfilled. Tidball explains that Christ "nullified the ceremonial law, abolishing its regulations through fulfilling it in himself, thus making them an anachronism. Because he did so, these laws can no longer exercise their divisive powers."[92] In other words, the laws that specifically divided Jew and Gentile—do not eat this, sacrifice that, observe this holiday, get circumcised, do not intermarry, Gentiles can go only so far in the temple—these commands are now done away with. It is not just the ceremonial laws that are now gone, but the old covenant to which they were intricately attached has been replaced by the new covenant. Under the new covenant God no longer imposes these expectations on his children. This arrangement not only grants Gentiles wide open access to enter the kingdom of God, but it also enables fellowship between Jews and Gentiles in ways formerly not possible.[93]

This explanation about the nature of the dividing wall shows how the previously cited advocates of the multi-ethnic mandate often interpret Ephesians 2:14 incorrectly. Paul is not talking about generic ethnic divides but specifically the aspects of

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[91]Graham A. Cole, *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity: 2009), 181.

[92]Dereck Tidball, The *Message of the Cross. Wisdom Unsearchable, Love Indestructible* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2001), 228.

[93]See O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 199. There are a number of ways in which the Law could have been "removed." Others suggest that the dividing wall is not the Law's ceremonial aspect but the misapplication of the Law. In this case, the scribal interpretation of the Law, or the fence around the Law, is what is removed. Martin favors this view in light of the second-century B.C. Letter of Aristeas. This letter recounts a contemporary view in Judaism that God gave the Law to prevent the Gentiles from having access to God (Martin, *Ephesians*, 146). Another view is that the curse of the Law is what is removed, leaving the moral components intact (See O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 198.) O'Brien offers a good summary of the main interpretations of how the dividing wall could be related to the Law.

the law-covenant that divided Jew from Gentiles. Therefore, someone cannot impose ethnic distinctions onto Paul's words. The apostle has something uniquely covenantal in mind.

Stevens recognizes that Paul is referring to the Mosaic Law in Ephesians 2:14.[94] But he goes onto apply the Jew/Gentile situation to modern ethnic divides. In other words, even though Paul is talking about the Mosaic Law that is now removed in Christ, Stevens believes it is still appropriate to *apply* Paul's words to modern examples of ethnic strife.

Is this a fair use of Ephesians 2:14? No, it is not, for three reasons. First, God never made a covenant with other ethnic groups. Paul's argument makes little sense if God had never called out Israel and made this nation his chosen people. But God has never done that to any other people group. (Nearly all ethnic divides today are Gentile-on-Gentile divides.) What divided the Jews from the Gentiles was a special divine arrangement that was now coming to an end.

Using the African American/white divide as an example, no such arrangement has ever existed with African Americans or whites. God never established one set of rules for African Americans to follow and a different set of rules for whites to follow. He never entered into covenant with, say, African Americans, while excluding white people. God never called white people "his son" while neglecting African Americans. In other words, there never was an Ephesians-like "dividing wall" between African Americans and whites. Yes, there was a wall between these groups that divided them. This wall and this division led to hostility between the two groups.   But this wall in American history was primarily sinful. It was simply racism at its worst. So even though people of both

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[94]He writes, "Certainly the barrier formed by the 'dividing wall of hostility' is a figure of speech referring to the Mosaic law. However, it was not the law itself that was the alienating force. It was rather the *misunderstood* and *misused law* that epitomized the dividing wall between Israel and the nations. The law, good in and of itself (Rom 3:31), had been misappropriated as an ethnic-defining boundary marker to consolidate Jewish identity" (Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 105, italics his).

ethnicities felt (and sometimes still feel) the existence of a "dividing wall of hostility," this is simply a semantic parallel. No such wall has ever existed, as long as people are talking about the kind of wall Paul is describing in Ephesians 2. What happens in some discussion of the multi-ethnic mandate is that contributors employ Paul's language and apply it to an unrelated modern situation, although the only commonality is a linguistic similarity.

Second, the dividing wall was originally the will of God. To take the word "hostility" in Ephesians 2:14 and apply it to racism is dangerous. As shown above, the dividing wall to which Paul is referring is the Mosaic Law, and the Mosaic Law was God's idea. He made the wall; then he removed it in Christ. The division was God's will, not the by-product of human sin. Racism, on the other hand, is the result of human sin and never is the result of what God commands. So to apply Ephesians 2:14 to ethnic strife today actually runs the risk of making God a racist, because he was the architect of wall, the Law, which is "holy and righteous and good" (Rom 7:12).

Sometimes what divides ethnicities is not sin but simply cultural preference. This leads to the third reason the dividing wall does not have direct application to modern ethnic difference: the factors that divide ethnicities today still linger but the Jew/Gentile divide has been fully removed. This is a fundamental difference that exists in the nature of the Ephesians 2 dividing wall and the so-called "dividing walls" today. The cross effectively tore down the wall between Jews and Gentiles. It did not merely highlight the potential that it could one day be torn down, and it did not set the stage for the apostles to tear it down in the first-century church. Christ's blood actually and definitely tore down the wall. For the post-atonement world, Jewish commands to circumcise sons, observe holidays, sacrifice in a particular format, and maintain a diet were obsolete from day one. This does not mean that Jews quickly and easily understood that the dividing wall had been torn down. Certainly the NT narrative reveals it took decades to grasp Gentile

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inclusion, and even then there is evidence that some Jews desired to hang on to the cultural preferences the Mosaic Law had created. But this lingering expression of Judaism does not suggest that the dividing wall slowly was torn down. It was only the Jewish/Christian understanding that the dividing wall had been torn down that took some time. Thus, Christ effectively and fully removed the dividing wall.

But did Christ remove by his death the various differences between cultures today? Not at all. Before Christ's death, one culture may prefer potatoes as its primary starch. Another culture may prefer rice. After the death of Christ the first culture still likes potatoes and the second culture still likes rice. The death of Christ was not intended to move the needle on these types of cultural differences (except for the aspects of man's culture that are sinful). As obvious as this point is, when the multi-ethnic mandate group applies Ephesians 2:14 to cultural preferences, this is what they are claiming. In effect they say, "One culture likes *X*; another culture likes *Y*, and this difference tends to cause them to gather in homogeneous groups, but Christ has overcome all these factors that separate us." Such statements threaten to cheapen the blood of Christ. If this statement were true, Christ has not actually accomplished the goal for which he died, because ethnic strife and cultural differences often remain strong. If cultural differences persist, how can anyone claim that Christ has torn down cultural differences?

In brief, Paul's main concern in Ephesians 2:11-22 is that his readers understand the titanic covenantal shift that took place because of Calvary. Paul's "dividing wall of hostility" refers to the old covenant that has been laid to rest. The gospel has gone global, and the Messianic expectation of the OT now finds fulfillment in the nations. Finding an endorsement of the multi-ethnic mandate in Paul's words is to import one's thesis back into a text. If readers will keep in mind how much Jewish Christians struggled to accept Gentile inclusion into new covenant, it will guard against misinterpretation and misapplication of key passages that are cited in support of the

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multi-ethnic mandate. Jews and Gentiles are now one, and these declarations (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11) are reminders that they are now members of one covenant.[95]

Jewish Christians Struggled
to Accept Gentile Salvation

The previous sections have challenged some often-accepted notions of Jew/Gentile relations. I have suggested that "Jew" and "Gentile" are not primarily ethnic terms, that they often were not as culturally distant as some assume, and that modern ethnic groups have no parallel to the old covenant that once separated Jew from Gentile. Each of these points challenges the idea that the NT focus on Jew/Gentile unity means that all churches today must be multi-ethnic. The thesis presented below serves the same end, but to far greater effect. Here I will show the radical discontinuity between Jew/Gentile relations in the first century and modern ethnic distinctions by critiquing what is, in my opinion, the strongest argument for the multi-ethnic mandate— Jew/Gentile table fellowship.

The previous chapter demonstrated how Paul's mystery, the atonement, and the no-distinction passages all declare that Jews and Gentiles are one. But the priority of Jew/Gentile table fellowship is more instructive than the other expressions of oneness because table fellowship shows that the Jew/Gentile unity envisioned by the apostles placed Jews and Gentiles in the same local church. Getting down to the congregational level is what is necessary to uphold the multi-ethnic mandate, because the mandate itself pertains to individual churches. For this reason, I believe the argument based on table fellowship is the best argument for the multi-ethnic mandate. Maintaining table fellowship is the focus of two key passages: Acts 15:19-21 and Galatians 2:11-14.

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[95]Even Mathews and Park recognize that Jew/Gentile unity is "not so much a sociological issue as it was a theological issue" (Kenneth A. Mathews and M. Sydney Park, *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011], 151). They go on to recognize that Jewish separation from Gentiles was the result of God's unique covenant with Israel. It was not rooted in racism against a specific people group or skin color (152).

The following critique will demonstrate that the Jew/Gentile situation is not like modern ethnic divides because many Jewish Christians in the first century struggled to believe that a Gentile could inherit salvation without first becoming a Jew. Few if any believers today think that salvation is reserved for their own ethnic group—hence, the discontinuity.

To make this case I first need to say a word about the nature of table fellowship in the ancient world. Bartchy offers a helpful summary of the social implications of sharing a meal together in a biblical worldview:

> It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of table fellowship for the cultures of the Mediterranean basin in the first century or our era. Mealtimes were far more than occasions for individuals to consume nourishment. Being welcomed at a table for the purpose of eating food with another person had become a ceremony richly symbolic of friendship, intimacy and unity. Thus betrayal or unfaithfulness toward anyone with whom one had shared the table was viewed as particularly reprehensible. On the other hand, when persons were estranged, a meal invitation opened the way to reconciliation. Even everyday mealtimes were highly complex events in which social values, boundaries, statuses and hierarchies were reinforced. . . . Coming together to eat became the occasion for sensing again that one was an integral, accepted part of a group. Beyond the household, people generally preferred to eat with persons from their own social class. . . . People invited their social, religious, and economic equals.[96]

Scripture confirms this summary of the *meaning* of table fellowship. Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for being liberal in his table fellowship (Mark 7:2-4; cf. Luke 15:2).[97] This critique of Jesus makes sense only given the understanding that sharing a meal with someone conveys some measure of approval to that person. Similarly, when a member has been disciplined by a local church, the result is that the rest of the church is to refrain from eating with that person (1 Cor 5:9; cf. 2 Thess 3:14).[98] Choosing to experience table

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[96]S. S. Bartchy, "Table Fellowship: Gospels," in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 1063. See David W. Pao, "Family and Table-Fellowship in the Writings of Luke," in *This Side of Heaven: Race Ethnicity and the Christian Faith*, ed. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (New York: Oxford, 2007), 186-91.

[97]Bartchy, "Table Fellowship: Gospels," 1063-64.

[98]The connection between excommunication and table fellowship may demonstrate that the Lord's Supper is in view in these passages.

fellowship with someone else is a testimony of sorts that says, "I approve of the one with whom I am eating." Understanding not just the reality of table fellowship but the meaning of table fellowship will be essential for understanding why Jew/Gentile table fellowship should not lead to the multi-ethnic mandate.

The other essential observation for a proper understanding of Jew/Gentile table fellowship is to recognize the soteriological context of the table fellowship passages. The setting for the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 begins in Acts 10 with Peter's vision and encounter with Cornelius. Now being convinced the gospel should be offered to Gentiles, Peter testifies, "everyone who believes in him [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43). The centurion is converted (10:44), which leads Peter to inform the apostles in Jerusalem that Gentiles are now receiving the Spirit (11:1-18). The Jerusalem church concludes, "'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life'" (11:18).

Meanwhile the church in Antioch was also experiencing Gentile conversions (11:19-30). The gospel-expansion into Gentile territory eventually led to the Jerusalem Council. The issue at hand was whether or not Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved, as some were claiming (15:1). At the Council Peter reminds his audience that God has poured out his Spirit on Gentiles already and that Jew and Gentiles are both saved by grace (15:7-11).

After concluding the circumcision will not be required of Gentile converts, the apostles suggest a four-fold compromise. Gentile Christians should abstain "from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood" (15:20; cf. 15:29; 21:25). These instructions seem to be geared, at least in part, at creating and/or preserving table fellowship between conservative Jews and Gentile believers in the church. The pertinent point at hand is that the discussion of table fellowship occurs in a soteriological context. The over-arching concern is whether or not

Gentiles can be saved "as is," or whether or not they must first embrace the Jewish Law to be right with God.

Soteriology is also the context in Galatians. Paul writes this epistle because some of the Galatians were "turning to a different gospel" (Gal 1:6), and Paul goes to great lengths in the first two chapters to establish that "the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel" (1:11). For this reason Paul proclaims with boldness "that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (2:16). This reality holds true for Jew and Gentile alike, for God's promise to Abraham included the blessing of the nations (3:7-9). Therefore, Jews and Gentiles have the same standing before God. Circumcision and the Law no longer are the terms by which God interacts with man, but "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (3:26). Galatians 3:28 is situated in this context, where Paul is delineating what it takes to be "heirs according to the promise" (3:29). F. F. Bruce explains how this verse on equality (3:28) fits into Paul's broader argument:

> Paul's position was clear-cut: had the law shown itself able to impart life, this would have given the Jews an overwhelming advantage; but since the law's inability to do any such thing had been demonstrated, there was now no distinction between Jews and Gentiles before God in respect either of their moral bankruptcy or of their need to receive his pardoning grace. The law-free gospel put both communities on one and the same level before God, so that 'in Christ' there was 'neither Jew nor Greek.'[99]

Paul recounts his confrontation of Peter (2:11-14) in order to play a part of this larger argument about justification. Paul wants to show that Jews and Gentiles have equal access to salvation and that there are no privileged classes in God's kingdom. The most likely reconstruction is that Peter reverted back to OT food laws as the church gathered. This decision meant that Gentiles were barred from coming to the love feasts because they had a different diet, which left Peter eating only with Jews. Peter's

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[99]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 188.

withdrawal effectively served to "force the Gentiles to live like a Jew" (2:14). If they wanted to be part of the church, they first had to become a Jew.

No longer maintaining table fellowship with Gentiles "was not in step with the truth of the gospel" (2:14). Paul uses similar language to defend his decision not to circumcise Titus, "so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you" (2:5). Paul does not want to circumcise Titus because doing so would have effectively communicated that circumcision is necessary for salvation. Paul's repetition of a similar phrase shows he has the same idea in mind regarding table fellowship. Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentiles insinuated that observing Jewish food laws is a necessary part of the Christian life.[100] This is why Peter's refraining from table fellowship with Gentiles is such a big deal—it suggests that Gentiles must enter into a relationship with God through the Law. Paul wants Jews and Gentiles in the same congregation and at the same table because this structure produces more surety that his readers have understood and applied justification by faith alone to their lives. If the Jews and Gentiles remained separate, the same error the Judaizers originally brought could have subtly crept back into the minds of the Galatians unknowingly. But by calling Jews and Gentiles to fellowship together, Paul ensures that both parties would live under the new covenant and not the old. Separate churches would have tacitly communicated that Jewish believers are superior to Gentile believers, but a joint Jew/Gentile church is an affirmation that circumcision and kosher eating do not save.

Having sketched the soteriological context in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 and having referenced what table fellowship meant in the NT world, the difference between modern ethnic divisions and Jew/Gentile divisions is hopefully plain. When Jewish and Gentile Christians ate together, the message sent by this fellowship was "we are all

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[100]Thomas S. Schreiner, *Galatians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 146.

equally saved apart from the Law." When a group of Christian Jews ate without Gentiles, the message sent was "a Gentile has to follow the Law to be saved."

Mono-ethnic table fellowship today does not send the same signal. Where is the church that claims everyone else has to observe a certain diet to be right with God? Is there a Korean church out there that claims that others have to first become Korean before they can be saved? Does the presence of an African American congregation suggest today that believers who attend a white church are second class members of Gods' family? Not a bit. Table fellowship simply means something entirely different today than it did in the first-century world. Mono-ethnicity in Acts 15 or Galatians 2 communicated that some people could not be saved "as is." Today mono-ethnicity in a church is normally simply the result of people preferring different worship styles.

For there to be a fitting parallel between Jews and Gentiles and modern ethnic differences, a group of converts would have to be so enamored with their own ethnic identity that they (like Jonah) genuinely did not desire to see God work among other people groups. Or if a church said, "You have to become Latino to be saved," then such a church would parallel the Galatian situation.

Mathews and Park urge, "We must be willing to receive those of all races in corporate worship and fellowship."[101] But who disagrees with this assertion today? What church is not willing to receive anyone into her membership who has a credible profession of faith? Although a few churches have officially barred Christians of certain ethnicities from membership in the past, and although even more have unofficially barred some from membership due to racism, certainly the vast majority of churches in America have an open membership policy.[102] The following reasoning worked in the first-century

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[101]Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 245.

[102]I have come across only two actual examples of churches that actively excluded others based on ethnicity. Stevens points to the following South African Dutch Reformed statement: "God willed separate races and nations, each with a different language, culture, etc., and therefore racial separation

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Jew/Gentile world: "We have to sit together because sitting together symbolizes that we both can inherit salvation." But today there is no debate about the ability of Gentiles to be grafted in without first becoming Jews.[103]

Appealing to Jew/Gentile table fellowship to uphold the multi-ethnic mandate is simply comparing apples to oranges.[104] In the NT world, Jew/Gentile table fellowship was needed to uphold the truth that "whosoever [Jew and Gentile] calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13).[105] That connection does not exist today. Yes, the NT is extremely interested in fostering table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles, but it prioritizes this arrangement because the apostles are concerned to preserve the freeness of the gospel.[106] Thus, Jew/Gentile relations do not correspond to ethnic differences today.

(even within the Christian Church) which will keep the races intact, is not only permissible, but a Christian duty" (quoted in Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 72). The second example happened in Philadelphia in 1794. Absalom Jones was prohibited from joining the Pennsylvania Protestant Episcopal Diocese. In light of such ostracism, he started St. Thomas Church in Philadelphia. This black congregation initially limited its own membership to black people. St. Thomas Church eventually was accepted into the diocese in 1865 (A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God: How Revelation and Redemption Lead to Reconciliation* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001] 47).

Sadly, there are far more examples of churches in the American South that have subtly (and some not so subtly) asked African American believers to attend the church down the street because they were not white. Such actions should be condemned in the strongest possible way. None of my defense of mono-ethnic churches is intended to support (actively or passively) such forms of ostracism. Eagerly welcoming all is a must.

[103]As a comparison, the following reasoning also worked in first-century Corinth: "Women have to wear head coverings to reflect submission to their husbands" (1 Cor 11:2-16). But today that biblical ideal is manifested in different ways.

[104]Interestingly, Mathews and Park seem to recognize the difference between the Jew/Gentile divide and current ethnic divides: "People today are more likely motivated to abstain from sharing a meal with another for purely sociological reasons. Economic or social distinctions, as well as personality clashes, usually serve as reasons for exclusion in table fellowship" (Mathews and Park, *The Post-Racial Church*, 236). Yet he does not trace this distinction to its logical end, which is that Jew/Gentile passages do not have a direct bearing on multi-ethnic churches.

[105]The very fact that God communicated to Peter that Gentiles could be saved through a vision about food demonstrates the essential connection between table fellowship and salvation (Acts 10).

[106]Unfortunately a lot of confusion and misplaced passion are added to this debate when proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate link multi-ethnic churches with "the gospel" (DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 184). The point of this section has been to demonstrate that it was a gospel issue in the first century due to the imposition of the Law onto Gentiles. If such imposition is not happening in mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic churches, the gospel is not at stake. J. Daniel Hays correctly says that an improper understanding of justification led to an improper ecclesiology in Galatia (J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 183). But this same concern cannot be played in reverse and applied to mono-

A Response to the Heaven Argument

The heaven argument maintains that the earthly church needs to look like the heavenly church. John's vision in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 confirm that the heavenly assembly is multi-ethnic, and this calls churches today to be multi-ethnic.

The first step in responding to this argument is to recognize that there is some God-intended discontinuity between the heavenly church and the earthly church. There are many churches today; there is only one heavenly assembly. The local church today is (should be) multi-generational, but it is doubtful that the heavenly assembly will have believers who are not in their prime. The church today hosts funerals and sings songs of lament. The church in its final state will rejoice. Many in the church today are married, but saints will no longer be given to this union in eternity. The church today now fasts, but the heavenly assembly will have no reason to mourn because the bridegroom has come. The church today is often a part of a denomination; the heavenly assembly will not need them because everyone's theology will be the same. Christians today are not to store up treasures. Christians in heaven are meant to have and enjoy them. The church today evangelizes. The church above will have no need. The church today engages in spiritual warfare, but the battle is over in the new heavens and new earth.[107] In short, the differences between the local assembly and the heavenly assembly are numerous.

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ethnic churches. Claiming that a church will eventually see the need to become multi-ethnic if it just understands the gospel simply reveals that the person making this claim has not understood gospel implications correctly.

[107]Rev 7:9, which is used by many to promote the multi-ethnic mandate, even provides evidence of the discontinuity between this age and the age to come. In the heavenly choir believers are wearing white robes and holding palm branches. Osborne notes the significance of the white robes: "These are the robes of purity but especially of victory, resembling here a Roman triumph in which the conquering general would lead a victory procession through the streets of Rome wearing a pure white toga" (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 319). See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 425. Palm branches also recall a military victory. John tells of a different crowd waiving palm branches when Jesus entered Jerusalem because the people believed him to be entering the city as a conquering military leader (John 12:13). Palm branches represent victory over one's enemy in Jewish extra-biblical literature (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 428). So the white robes and palm branches in heaven depict the victory. They highlight that the battle is over, but believers on earth are still in a battle (Eph 6:10-18).

Sometimes the lingering effects of the fall require that the local church differ from her heavenly counterpart in significant ways. Other times the limitations of earthly bodies create discontinuity between this age and the age to come.

As the church experiences these differences, the faithful response is not always to push toward heavenly ideal. Believers should not stop fasting or getting married or participating in denominational life just because heaven will not be that way. Churches should excel in these areas. These characteristics—marriage, fasting, denominational life—are not matters where additional sanctification will reverse the trend. Instead, these decisions please the Lord, and they remind Christians that certain aspects of the kingdom are "not yet."

But this is not the complete picture. Some aspects of the heavenly assembly certainly need to be replicated in the earthly assembly. The heavenly assembly is holy, so the church should strive for more holiness now.[108] Every tear will be wiped away in the heavenly assembly, so churches try to alleviate physical suffering, and they pray for the sick. The heavenly church is rich, so the church today strives to reverse some of the effects of poverty. The heavenly church praises God in song. When the church sings songs of praise, this worship is a foretaste of what is to come. In these areas the heavenly ideal provides a model for the church today.

Thus, a biblical understanding of the relationship between the heavenly assembly and the earthly assembly requires a delicate balance. In some ways, the church needs to imitate the heavenly vision; in other ways believers need to recognize that they are not in heaven yet. Therefore, it is short-sighted when proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate declare, "The church today must be multi-ethnic because heaven is multi-ethnic." But it would be equally short-sighted for me simply to argue that ethnic

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[108]That righteousness would prevail seems to be the precise point of continuity between the heavenly ideal and the earthly reality when Christ prays for heavenly ideals to be replicated on earth (Matt 6:10).

diversity is a point of discontinuity like marriage. A case needs to be made to support either claim.

The question at hand can be asked like this: is the ethnic diversity of the heavenly assembly a matter of continuity or discontinuity between the two ages? Should churches take their cue from Revelation 5:9 and 7:9-10 and strive for every tribe, tongue, people and nation to be present on Sunday? Or is it acceptable just to wait until God makes all that possible in eternity?

Answers to these questions are best found by weighing the evidence found in the other six arguments in this paper. If the rest of Scripture requires churches to be multi-ethnic, then John's multi-ethnic vision needs to become the vision of all Christians today. If the rest of Scripture grants freedom for churches to take on both mono- and multi-ethnic forms, then John's vision should be interpreted as a prophetic picture that churches today do not necessarily have to imitate.

That said, I suggest that the picture of the heavenly assembly in Revelation offers a clue that reveals that the church today does not have to imitate eschatological diversity. The heavenly chorus is composed of believers from "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" which sings to God "with *a* loud voice" (7:10). People who spoke French, English, Arabic and Urdu on earth will be able to sing the same song in the same voice. Apparently believers will speak the same language. The communication in heaven, at least in John's portrait, is not like Pentecost, where everyone retains their own tongue yet hears the gospel in their own language. In heaven, those from many languages speak in one language.

If the heavenly kingdom provides a blueprint for what churches need to look like today as it regards matters of ethnic diversity, then churches would need to be multi-ethnic *and* mono-lingual. The consistent application of the heaven argument would mean churches should not accommodate everyone by singing one song in Spanish, another in

Korean, and a few in English. Nor should churches translate the sermon. Instead, faithfulness to the heavenly model would mean teaching all believers in a particular congregation the same language.

Yet such an approach would surely compromise a basic understanding of Christian growth. To order a multi-lingual church to use only the same language (like the heavenly assembly) would be entirely unhelpful. It confuses discipleship with acculturation. Now a new believer from the minority culture has to learn a new language as a part of the sanctification process. To be clear, no proponent of the multi-ethnic mandate proposes that multi-ethnic churches all decide to speak one language. But if the heavenly assembly is the required model for today, then this needs to be the new direction for the church. If someone recoils at the suggestion that churches need to teach people to express their faith in a different language from the one they grew up speaking, then I propose he should listen to his instincts.

While the church on earth needs to look like the church in heaven in many ways, the future has not fully invaded the present (nor should it). Ethnic diversity is a point of discontinuity. As such, the church below will be different from the church above. To insist that ethnic diversity be present in each local church is simply an over-realized eschatology.

A Response to the Argument Based on NT Examples

The two best examples of multi-ethnic churches in the NT are found in Jerusalem and Antioch. Believers in Jerusalem struggle to maintain the daily distribution of food to Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1-7), revealing a cultural and/or linguistic divide. The church in Antioch was led by men from different parts of the Mediterranean world (13:1). This multi-ethnic leadership is suggestive of a multi-ethnic church. Do these two examples call all congregations today to strive to be as ethnically diverse as their communities?

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I do not believe these examples require all churches to be multi-ethnic. The first consideration of any argument based on a biblical example is to ask if this example is descriptive or prescriptive. An example might be, after all, just an example. These details of ethnic differences in the early church could be tangential to Luke's main point. While opting for a descriptive interpretation seems to be the easier way to support my thesis, doing so ignores that the book of Acts is given not just as a historical record but as a general model. Where possible, the more responsible hermeneutic is to see if a prescriptive interpretation is achievable.[109] Because a key theme in Acts is the gospel expanding to all peoples, readers of Acts should pay careful attention to situations where the church is extending across a cultural divide. The gospel penetrating multiple ethnic groups is one of Luke's main points, so it is tough to chalk these details up to a historical curiosity that is not relevant today. Therefore, to some extent the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch must be instructive for the church today. A closer study of the situation in Jerusalem and Antioch is necessary to see if and to what extent these examples are a blueprint for multi-ethnicity.

Jerusalem

Acts 6:1-7 records a problem and its proposed solution in Jerusalem church when "Hellenists" complained that their widows were being overlooked.[110] This passage is one of the more interesting passages in this debate because both sides use this text in defense of their respective positions. Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate point out

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[109]Allison provides a very helpful overview of the two schools of thought regarding what role Acts plays in shaping a biblical ecclesiology today. He cites those who argue that Acts is prescriptive for today and those who believe Acts is simply descriptive of the first-century situation. His conclusion seems correct, that readers should lean into the idea that Acts is provided to the church as a model and is therefore prescriptive. Yet this hermeneutic does not seek to apply every detail of Acts to the church today. The reader should use the analogy of faith and seek to understand Luke's main point behind a particular episode (Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 43-48).

[110]The "Hellenists" here were Greek-speaking Jews. For an in-depth examination of this group, see Witherington, *Acts*, 440-47.

how the apostles, upon facing a cultural divide in the church, did not suggest the establishment of a Hellenistic church and a Hebraic church.[111] On the other hand Wagner points out that each of the seven men elected to serve the widows have Greek names. Hellenists are elected to solve the problem of the Hellenists being overlooked; there seems to be little concern for establishing culturally diverse leadership. The priority seems to be getting the conflict resolved. So, Wagner finds support for his HUP in this text.[112]

Prill provides help in adjudicating between these two interpretations. As he reconstructs what led to the controversy between the Hebraic and the Hellenistic widows, he believes this problem could have happened only if the Hebrews and Hellenistic Jews initially had separate meetings. How else could the women have been overlooked, he asks. If a Hellenistic widow were sitting on a couch beside a Hebraic widow doing a Bible study as a part of the life of the church at Jerusalem, it seems almost impossible that church leaders would give one widow her necessary allotment yet not give it to the other. The more natural way to envision the problem occurring is that both groups met separately in different homes. Then, perhaps due to language barriers or simply an oversight, church leaders apportioned food in one location but not another. Thus, the very problem most likely arose because they already gathered separately.[113] Readers should note that the problem the apostles tried to solve by the appointment of seven men was not the fact that Hebraic Jews were not fellowshipping with Hellenistic Jews. The

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[111]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 131-33. See Streett, "An Interview with Rodney Woo," 81-82.

[112]Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 120-26.

[113]Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethic Church," 333-36. Prill ultimately defends the multi-ethnic mandate, but he supports the idea of a homogeneous congregation within a heterogeneous congregation, which is what he believes happened in Jerusalem, where both the Hebrews and the Hellenists had their own gatherings and their own leaders, but both groups understood themselves to be part of the same church. Prill believes this model of homogeneity within heterogeneity can be an effective model for reaching immigrant populations (ibid., 333).

problem that needed attention was that widows were going hungry. Presumably the

separate gatherings would have continued had everyone been served appropriately.

Mbandi thinks the above reconstruction makes too much of the seven men

having Greek names:

> The names of the seven persons selected are Greek (v. 5). However, this does not conclusively suggest that all the seven persons were Hellenists. This assumption has been used to support the idea that there were two groups within the Jerusalem church: the Hebrew Christians being led by the apostles and Hellenistic Christians who were led by the seven. This conclusion seems to stretch Luke's narrative. The seven were elected to take the responsibility of administering charity, so as to allow the apostles to "give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (cf. Acts 6:2-4).[114]

He then cautions readers against making too much of the seven names, which he claims

were not unusual names among Diaspora Jews.

The problem with Mbandi's caution is that he offers little evidence to support

his warning of misinterpretation. If correct, the best explanation for Mbandi's theory is

that the seven elected men each, by chance, happened to have Greek names while trying

to solve a problem that directly related to other Hellenists. The probability of these stars

aligning is slim. McIntosh and McMahan note that "when the chance arose to set an

example of diversity in leadership, the people were allowed to choose those of their own

homogeneous unit, which they did without being criticized."[115]

The better explanation is to revert to Prill's analysis. There is strong reason to

believe the church in Jerusalem met in homes.[116] Apparently some of the house

gatherings were ethnically similar, a result that seems likely given the nature of

household conversions in Acts. Therefore, appealing to the church in Jerusalem in Acts

6:1-7 does more to affirm homogeneous gatherings and homogeneous leadership than it

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[114]Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding," 226-27.

[115]Gary L. McIntosh and Alan McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why it Matters and How it Works* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2012), 113.

[116]See appendix 2 for a more thorough description of how house church gatherings related to a prevailing city-wide concept of church unity.

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does to support heterogeneous gatherings and heterogeneous leadership. It gives believers permission if they want their spiritual leaders to be people who intimately understand their cultural perspective and struggles. If Christians are to take comfort that Christ can sympathize with their weaknesses (Heb 4:15), surely it is an acceptable desire to want one's pastors and deacons to be able to understand his unique struggles firsthand. Many a black parishioner finds such leadership in an African American congregation.[117]

Antioch

It must be acknowledged that the church in Antioch had a diverse leadership team. More significant than this historical fact is that Luke seems to go out of his way to mention it. The inclusion of these details suggests Luke wishes to draw attention to the diversity of this church. Furthermore, this example is proof that churches are free to pursue multi-ethnicity. No part of this dissertation seeks to argue that churches ought to be mono-ethnic or that multi-ethnicity is a silly goal.

Yet the church in Antioch does not prescribe a model of ethnic diversity that all churches must follow. The primary reason is because Antioch was a new frontier for gospel expansion. Acts 11:20 reports, "But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists[118] also, preaching the Lord Jesus." The significance of this passage is that believers are finally sharing the gospel with non-Jews. The gospel message is now going beyond the borders of Jerusalem, even if it did take persecution to cause it to happen, and a large number of Greeks respond favorably (11:21).

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[117]This conclusion does not rise or fall on the suggestion by some that the Seven in Acts 6 became the spiritual leaders of the Hellenists while the apostles remained the spiritual leaders of the Hebrews. The pertinent fact is that the Seven did become leaders over the Hellenists in some respects, but this structure could have co-existed under the apostles' oversight.

[118]This is the same term used in 6:1, where the referent was to Greek-speaking Jews. Here, however, the context favors that these Hellenists were non-Jewish Greeks, or Gentiles (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 414).

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Because Christianity was spreading to a new area and a new group of people, the leadership of the church had to be diverse. This is a necessary byproduct of missionary activity. The church at Antioch was a church plant. For it to get started and established, people from the outside had to get the movement going. If missionaries from Texas, Virginia and Canada partner to take the gospel to an unreached people group in the mountains of Nepal, the church that gets established will (at least initially) have leaders from Texas, Virginia, Canada and Nepal. Such diversity is a necessary component any time the gospel crosses into a new ethnicity.

Otherwise the newly converted Christians would be left to fend for themselves. This seems to be the situation in Antioch. The initial missionaries are from Cyprus and Cyrene, so Lucius and possibly Simeon may have been some of the initial evangelists to the area. The fact that the church in Antioch is in its infancy stages reveals one reason why the leadership had to be ethnically diverse.[119] Churches in America, however, are not in frontier missionary contexts. Therefore, it is inappropriate to find an implicit mandate in the Antioch church for all churches today to be ethnically diverse.

So, are the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch prescriptive for today? Yes. The church in Antioch is positioned at a transition point in Acts where Gentile inclusion is taking center-stage, and the diverse leadership in Antioch foreshadows the gospel expansion that will occur in the chapters that follow. The church in Antioch, then, calls churches today to take the gospel to all peoples. The church in Jerusalem is also prescriptive, for it shows believers that once the gospel gets established in an area, problems arise. These problems need to be addressed without favoritism, and the church in Jerusalem reminds readers of the essence of a pure and undefiled religion (Jas 1:27).

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[119]It appears that the churches planted from Antioch had local elders, presumably drawn from the converts Paul made on the first leg of his first missionary journey (14:23). The leaders in Antioch came from different areas, which created the diverse leadership. Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate often appeal to Antioch as their pattern for churches today. But the churches planted from Antioch did not mirror the diversity in Antioch in all respects because they had local elders.

Summary

Scripture never explicitly calls all churches to be as ethnically diverse as their communities. Those advocating that churches must be ethnically diverse are the ones claiming that most congregations are ordered the church incorrectly. In light of the size of their criticism and the absence of a clear command to be multi-ethnic, the burden of proof in this debate is on those who advocate for the multi-ethnic mandate. This chapter has shown that the strongest voices calling all churches to integrate have not met the necessary threshold of evidence.

The Babel/Pentecost argument wrongly identifies ethnic distinctions with sin, and the argument fails to recognize that Pentecost really does not reverse Babel at all. The hospitality/love argument assumes love has to cross an ethnic line to be genuine love. The argument based on Christ's ministry misunderstands the reason why Christ reaches out to Gentiles. The unity argument overlooks the fact that a mono-ethnic church can still be unified. The Jew/Gentile argument wrongly superimposes a conversation about the nature of the covenants and the way of salvation onto a conversation about ethnic and cultural differences. The heaven argument fails to recognize the discontinuity between the two ages, and the argument based on NT examples misses the missionary context in Antioch and the house church context in Jerusalem.

These arguments simply do not deliver the theological result that defenders of the multi-ethnic mandate want them to produce. These efforts regularly over-reach. Authors often take *an* appropriate application of a text and make it *the* application of the text for all churches. The same way Scripture never says whether God prefers large churches or small churches, Scripture offers no injunction to be multi-ethnic or mono-ethnic. As the church labors to take the gospel across cultures, it can do so by trying to establish a multi-ethnic church or by planting or partnering with a church that is a different ethnicity. This is a matter of Christian freedom.

John Frame offers a refreshing analysis in an otherwise lopsided debate where

most contributors argue for/assume the validity of the multi-ethnic mandate. Frame asks,

> Does Scripture place before us the goal of an "integrated society"? Yes, certainly, in the sense of a society in which love and respect exist between races. . . . But I do not believe there will ever be, or should be, in this world, a society in which racial differences are abolished, or in which people do not prefer to associate with people like themselves.[120]

Frame is aware that most people prefer to spend time with people who are culturally similar, and he does not believe this tendency is sinful. As he affirms the validity ethnically similar churches, he does so with the declaration that the kingdom of God has no place for racism. All believers should always welcome visitors from all backgrounds, yet God does not require every church to be multi-ethnic.[121] Such is the position advocated here.

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[120]John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 671-72.

[121]Ibid., 672-77.

CHAPTER 4

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF
A MONO-ETHNIC CHURCH

So far the question at hand has been "Does Scripture call all churches to be as ethnically diverse as their communities?" The previous chapter answered "no," and I concluded that the arguments summarized in chapter 2 do not faithfully demonstrate that the multi-ethnic mandate is biblical. But even if all the reasoning in the previous chapter is sound, all I have proven so far is that Scripture is silent on whether churches have to be multi-ethnic. My hope is that the deconstruction of the multi-ethnic mandate in chapter 3 has now cleared the way to ask a new question in this chapter: Does Scripture say anything positive about the value of mono-ethnic churches? Does the Bible give any hints that mono-ethnic churches are permissible and sometimes good? I will argue the answer to these questions is "yes." This chapter will lay a foundation for the permissibility of mono-ethnic churches by offering four reasons why such churches are consistent with biblical values and norms. As a result, mono-ethnic churches can be legitimate and healthy. I should stress that these reasons do not call all churches to be mono-ethnic; they give theological justification only to why some churches may end up looking that way.

The reasons are as follows: First, mono-ethnic churches help preserve culture, which God values. Second, mono-ethnic churches enable Christians to retain dual identities as a Christian and as a member of an ethnic group. Third, mono-ethnic churches benefit from high forms of contextualization. Fourth, mono-ethnic churches benefit from the natural connectedness of people, which God uses to expand his kingdom in Acts.

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Cultural Preservation

This section will show that mono-ethnic churches are valuable because they help preserve individual cultures rather than having those cultures assimilate into the majority culture.[1] The first step in making this case is to show that God cares about cultural preservation. If so, the second step is to show that mono-ethnic churches do a better job preserving culture than multi-ethnic churches.

Examining if God cares about cultural preservation begins in Genesis. God commands Adam to fill the earth, implying that God wanted Adam's descendants to spread out over the planet (Gen 1:28). Such geographic expansion would have eventually led to linguistic and cultural distinctions, even apart from sin or the verdict of Babel. Languages and cultures evolve over time and new ones emerge. Babel did not create all the languages in existence today. For instance, neither the English language nor African-American culture was created at Babel; they came to be over time. So, when peoples separate into different groups, different languages eventually emerge. These different languages give rise to different cultures. Although the diversity of languages was expedited at Babel, it would probably have happened anyway.[2]

This point indicates that God's original plan included—at least in some passive sense—the creation of linguistic and ethnic diversity. Moreover, the verdict of Babel

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[1]Each culture is marred with sin in some way, and certainly the sinful elements of a culture should not be preserved. When I refer to cultural preservation, I am referring only to its non-sinful aspects.

[2]Wagner makes a similar argument in C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 110-13. Conn has criticized Wagner for having an overly optimistic reading of the Babel account (Harvie M. Conn, "Looking for a Method: Backgrounds and Suggestions," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. William Shenk [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 90). McIntosh and McMahan are in line with Wagner's conclusion. They propose that the placement of the Table of Nations (Gen 10) before the Babel account (Gen 11) indicates that there already was ethnic diversity prior to Babel. With this understanding, the judgment at Babel becomes "a blessing in disguise, an affirmation that diversity is good and part of God's intention" (Gary McIntosh and Alan McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-ethnic Community: Why It Matters and How It Works* [Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2012], 43). While McIntosh and McMahan are correct that ethnic diversity has always been part of God's design, a better understanding of the chronology of Gen 10-11 is that divisions in Gen 10 were the result of what happened in Gen 11, and that Moses has inverted the order for stylistic reasons—probably to juxtapose the Babel event with the calling of Abram.

suggests that ethnic diversity is what God wants in the world because he could have prevented the building of a tower in any number of ways—destroying it with lightning, sending a mighty wind to knock it over, or having the earth swallow up everyone involved in the construction process. But his particular way of punishing the workers in Genesis 11 reveals that his punitive act helps accomplish his over-arching goal that mankind would spread out over the planet and thus subdivide into various groupings.

The multi-ethnic scene in heaven confirms the multi-ethnic intention of God more clearly. Revelation 7:9 showcases individuals from "all peoples" in the heavenly choir. John's description implies that they retain their ethnic identity in heaven.[3] The preservation of ethnic identity also appears in Revelation 21:3. The ESV renders it as follows: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his *people*, and God himself will be with them as their God.'" However, λαοὶ ("people") is plural. Piper maintains that this verse is generally not translated correctly. Therefore, John's vision of the new heaven and the new earth includes various peoples all dwelling with God.[4] "They will be his *peoples*" is the accurate rendering.

A final clue that ethnic identity is preserved in the new heaven and new earth is found later in the same chapter. John writes, "By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day— and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations" (21:24-26). Stevens claims this passage testifies to the beauty of various cultures and ethnicities in heaven. Apparently man's personal and ethnic identities—with all the various accomplishments that accompany them including scientific advancements,

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[3]C. Peter Wagner, "How Ethical is the Homogeneous Unit Principle?" *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 2, no. 1 (1978): 13.

[4]John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 197.

the arts, and language—will not be lost when the kingdom reaches its fullness.[5] Instead, cultural diversity will accentuate the glory of the final state.

If ethnic diversity were intended by God from the beginning and will be preserved in the glorified state, then God has a keen interest in ethnic diversity. When the world is full of diverse image bearers, this mosaic brings glory to God more than ethnic uniformity. God is proven to be exceedingly glorious when he is admired and worshipped by a variety of peoples. Ethnic distinctions in God's kingdom are also central because such diversity leaves no room for ethnocentrism. No tribe or people can claim to have superior access to God.[6] Accordingly, Thabiti Anyabwile recognizes, "In some inscrutable way the very distinction of language and nation heighten for all eternity the glory of God in redemption."[7]

If ethnic distinctions bring glory to God, it follows that God cares about cultural preservation. If widespread assimilation gradually reduced the total number of ethnicities, then there would be less overall diversity. Because God wants diversity, one may conclude he values the preservation of cultures. The apostles' willingness to allow Jews to retain their ethnic identity also confirms this conclusion.

Those who defend the multi-ethnic mandate normally support what I have said up to this point. Proponents of multi-ethnic churches insist that the goal of their diverse

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[5]David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 218. Contra Piper, Stevens and me, some believe that ethnic diversity will not be present in the age to come. Cosgrove interprets Gal 3:28 through eschatological lenses. He recognizes that Paul does not give an imperative but an indicative: "There is neither Jew nor Greek." But the setting in Galatia did not reflect this unity at the time of Paul's writing, so Cosgrove takes the apostle to be setting forth his vision of unity as a description of what the new creation will look like. "Certainly in his vision of the final conclusion of God's saving work, Paul sees the end of life as we know it. In that consummation of all things, ethnic differences will disappear, giving way to the ultimate" (Charles H. Cosgrove, "Did Paul Value Ethnicity?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 no 2 [2006]: 279).

[6]Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 198-200. Piper restates the core of this argument in Piper, *Bloodlines*, 196-199.

[7]Thabiti Anyabwile, "The Glory and Supremacy of Jesus Christ in Ethnic Distinctions and over Ethnic Identities," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper,* ed. Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 300.

setting is not for anyone to give up his or her cultural identity through assimilation. Instead, the goal is to accommodate each group's cultural preference. "Therefore you should recognize that a healthy multi-ethnic church will be established not by assimilation but rather by accommodation," DeYmaz explains. "In other words, you must not ask or expect diverse others to check their culture at the door to become part of 'your' church."[8] Assimilation asks the minority group to give up its cultural preferences in order to express its faith the same way the majority culture does. Accommodation, on the other hand, does not ask minorities to give up their cultural preferences. Instead the majority culture makes room for their preferences through compromise.

Accommodation instead of assimilation is also biblical, Prill claims. The church in Jerusalem concludes that Gentile converts do not need to be circumcised. Prill takes the verdict of the Jerusalem Council that circumcision is not necessary to mean that the early church had a "non-assimilation policy, i.e., it was decided that to become Christian, non-Jews did not have to become Jews."[9] Gentiles could preserve their identity all the while worshipping alongside Jews. Accordingly, minorities should not have to give up their language, traditions and customs and adopt the culture of the majority ethnicity.

Likewise, Yancey stresses, "It is important for leaders of multiracial church to intentionally work to prevent the type of assimilation that disregards the racial culture of people from the nonmajority groups."[10] This is the accommodation model, and at first glance it appears to uphold God's concern for diversity while retaining a variety of ethnic preferences in the same congregation.

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[8]Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 45.

[9]Thorsten Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 (2009): 344.

[10]George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 153

Mbandi undergirds the need for accommodation over assimilation with an appeal to the incarnation. Christ gave up his rights and privileges as he took on human form without giving up his divinity.

> This implies the possibility of Christians from different ethnic groups identifying with one another, in the sense of unity in worship or services for the Lord, without losing their ethnic or cultural identity. This seems to go against the ideas of "assimilation" commonly associated with unity in multi-ethnic contexts. . . . Contrary to the notion of the melting pot, Christ did not lose his identity as God, yet he fully identified with humanity.[11]

Christ retained his divine identity while entering a new context, so Christians of different ethnic backgrounds should retain their ethnic identity even while worshipping in a multi-ethnic church, according to Mbandi.

I intend to show that this desire to accommodate an individual's ethnic preferences rather than causing that individual to assimilate works only in theory. Too often assimilation is the actual result, which means that multi-ethnic churches actually work against cultural preservation. I will begin to demonstrate this point by turning to Korie Edwards' empirical analysis of multi-ethnic churches.[12] Her research focuses primarily on churches that have both black and white members, and her findings reveal these multi-ethnic churches do far more assimilation than they probably intend. Edwards' conclusion delivers a devastating verdict about the loss of culture that minority Christians experience by participation in multi-ethnic churches.

In her research Edwards compared the frequency of certain cultural markers in white, black and multi-ethnic worship services. Examples of defining traits were giving verbal affirmation during the service, hand raising, spontaneous actions like jumping and

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[11]Paul Muindi Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding of the Unity of the Church in Relation to Ethnic Diversity" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004), 162-63. He goes on to warn that assimilation is a real concern for multi-ethnic churches (ibid., 280-83).

[12]Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial* Churches (New York: Oxford, 2008). When Edwards refers to "multi-ethnic" churches, she primarily has churches in mind that have both African-Americans and Anglos. These churches were the focus of her study, but she theorizes that her findings are applicable to other ehnic groups in multi-ethnic churches.

dancing, having a long service or a short service, having a choir, and having a time of greeting in the service. Edwards found *significant* differences in the worship habits of black churches and white churches. For instance, 61 percent of black churches used spontaneous worship forms, compared to only 4 percent of white congregations. Ninety percent of black churches had hand raising in their services, compared to 34 percent of white churches. The closest variable was having a time of greeting, with 8 percent and 20 percent of black and white churches having them, respectively.[13] One would theorize that multi-ethnic churches would fall somewhere between the numbers for black churches and white churches, revealing a healthy mixture of both black and white cultures being present in the service. But once her research took into consideration external controls such as the average age in the church and whether the church was charismatic, Protestant, or Catholic, *the difference between white churches and multi-ethnic churches disappeared*. In other words, multi-ethnic churches and white churches worshipped in the same manner. African Americans in these multi-ethnic churches ended up adopting white worship practices, but whites in those churches did not adopt black worship practices.[14]

Her description of her findings is worth quoting at length:

As I continued to visit interracial churches across the country, I noticed a pattern. Nearly all of the churches, regardless of their specific racial compositions, reminded me of the predominantly white churches I had visited. Generally, the churches were racially diverse at all levels. Whites and racial minorities were in the pews and in leadership. There were sometimes cultural practices and markers that represented racial minorities in these congregations, such as a gospel music selection, a display of flags from various countries around the world, or services translated into Spanish. Yet the diversity did not seem to affect the core culture and practices of the religious organizations. That is, the style of preaching, music, length of services, structure of services, dress codes, political and community activities, missionary interests, and theological emphases tended to be more consistent with those of the predominantly white churches I had observed. These churches exhibited many of the practices and beliefs common to white churches within their same religious affiliation, only with a

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[13]Ibid., 161.

[14]Ibid., 21-23.

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few additional "ethnic" practices or markers. It was like adding rainbow sprinkles to a dish of ice cream.[15]

Her analysis leads her to the conclusion that multi-ethnic churches have to adopt white customs if they are going to be successful.

> I have argued that interracial churches work to the extent that they are, first, comfortable places for whites to attend. . . . What this means is that, for interracial churches to stay interracial, racial minorities must be willing to sacrifice their preferences, or they must have already sufficiently acculturated into and accepted the dominant culture and whites' privileged status. Consequently, the chances for a widespread movement of interracial churches are slim. It depends on African Americans' willingness to compromise in the one area of American society where they are able to have power and control: religion. It further depends upon substantial African-American assimilation.[16]

Anthony Bradley agrees that black Christians often draw the short straw in multi-ethnic churches. This is one reason integration in the church has largely failed, because it "advances according to the limitations of white social norms. Because there is little discussion of power in relation to white privilege, minorities are usually put in positions where they have to check their ethnicity at the door in order to engage."[17]

Yancey also recognizes the concerns of those who fear multi-ethnic churches will force minorities to conform to an Anglo-majority culture. But he pushes for integration despite it. Culture loss can happen as minorities adopt the majority culture for themselves, or it can happen when minorities try to keep their cultural preferences which are then usurped by majority opinion. Either way, Yancey recognizes, culture is lost. The pertinent question for Yancey is whether maintaining a cultural identity is more important than multi-ethnicity at the church level. Yancey believes that what is gained by multi-ethnicity is greater than what is lost through assimilation. Cultures adapt over time anyway, he reasons. It is an exercise in futility to try to preserve a particular culture in its pristine form: "All cultures are constantly changing over time and will change

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[15]Ibid., 8.

[16]Ibid., 139-40.

[17]Anthony Bradley, "Moving Toward Racial Solidarity," *World Magazine*, September 7, 2011, accessed February 21, 2012, http://www.worldmag.com/2011/09/moving_toward_racial_solidarity.

regardless of how little or great of an influence they experience from exposure to other cultures. . . . The real concern is whether the changes that cultures have undergone are beneficial or harmful."[18] One problem Yancey finds with a strong focus on cultural maintenance is that a well-preserved culture with no interaction from outsiders can become blind to its own shortcomings. Because of sin, Yancey reminds that all cultures are corrupted to some extent and can be improved.[19] Thus, Yancey promotes multi-ethnicity even if that means that an ethnic group will lose a measure of its ethnic identity.

Stevens also asserts that having mono-ethnic churches for the purpose of cultural preservation is not a worthy mission: "As for ethnic specific churches, some begin to exist for the express purpose of keeping a language and culture alive in an artificial manner, whereas *what is needed is the adoption of a more widely used language and integration into a wider cultural context*."[20] In other words, minorities need to discard their ethnicity and get new cultural identity in order to function in the majority culture! This is assimilation at its worst.

The difficulty with Yancey and Stevens' dismissal of the value of cultural preservation is threefold. First, a mono-ethnic church can benefit from other churches and cultures without becoming multi-ethnic itself.[21] The idea that a mono-ethnic church is a bulwark of ethnic preservation that does not want to be refined by other cultures is misleading. Second, Scripture does seem to be concerned about ethnic preservation to

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[18]Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit,* 39-40.

[19]Ibid., 40.

[20]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 237-38, italics mine.

[21]Members of mono-ethnic churches can interact with other believers outside of the local church setting. Leaders can interact with leaders of churches that have a different ethnic make-up. Mono-ethnic churches can host joint worship services with other congregations, and denominational involvement can foster the kind of interaction that can help mono-ethnic churches be more aware of their cultural blind spots. More importantly, the sufficiency of Scripture should give mono-ethnic church leaders confidence that God has given each particular church what it needs to be faithful; cross-examination by a different ethnic group is not necessary for church health. Otherwise homogeneous churches in homogeneous communities are at an irreversible loss.

some extent. While not a primary biblical theme, the fact that ethnic distinctions were envisioned from Genesis and are preserved in Revelation affirms the inherent goodness of a multiplicity of peoples. Despite their stated goals, multi-ethnic churches often serve as engines of Anglo-conformity, which reduces the overall cultural diversity that brings glory to God. Third, when someone denies the validity of cultural preservation, he or she is overlooking how some Christians mature in their faith. Christians grow through interacting with others, and when cultural barriers create barriers to interaction, they create barriers to sanctification.

Woo admits that relationships are a challenge in multi-ethnic churches. He relays what a Korean member of his church, Wilcrest Baptist Church,[22] writes about her struggle regarding losing her ethnic identity.

> I initially experienced a kind of cultural loneliness [after coming to Wilcrest] since I was used to being in a church heavily infused with one culture. I felt constantly reminded of my "Korean-ness." I also felt as if I lived in two different worlds: Korean Christian and Wilcrest Christian. I really wanted these two worlds to collide, but my feeble attempts in bridging these two worlds usually consisted of conversation that felt polite and unnatural. Even now, I feel like there's an invisible wall that makes it a stretch to build an interpersonal bridge.[23]

Mono-ethnic churches require no such concessions, and members of these churches can foster relationships more easily. The church at large needs such churches in order for believers like this woman to interact meaningfully with her fellow church members.

In summary, mono-ethnic churches create environments where Christianity can come into full bloom within a certain ethnic milieu. Such churches can be forerunners for new ministry models. They can provide much-needed critiques to churches of different ethnicities. As mono-ethnic churches preserve a particular culture, they create

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[22]Woo is no longer the pastor at Wilcrest Baptist Church in Houston. He served there from 1992–2010, and he is now the senior pastor of International Baptist Church in Singapore.

[23]Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 114-15.

environments where songs and theologies can be written from a particular perspective. They can produce apologetics that respond to the unique barriers to faith that members of a particular ethnic group may feel. They can be a training ground for missionaries who will one day serve in a similar context overseas. They are visible testimonies to the dignity of a particular ethnic group, which is especially necessary in settings where discrimination is common. Mono-ethnic churches are cultural safe havens in a world where their members are regularly in the minority.

These are reasons why cultural preservation is good. If genuine diversity really glorifies God, then a variety of mono-ethnic churches in an area is an effective way to retain diversity in the kingdom of God. Such churches preserve the very distinctions that magnify God in the end. The alternative is to put everyone in the same room and pretend that a sufficient number of ethnic itches can be scratched. Reality reminds that this is not what normally happens, and minorities suffer as a result.

Dual Identities

The reader may wonder if the rebuttals to the multi-ethnic mandate and the defense of mono-ethnic churches run the risk of exalting one's ethnic identity over his or her identity in Christ. Some of the literature promoting the multi-ethnic mandate is a reaction to this concern. Stevens reminds readers that their ethnic distinctions must not be "our primary identity" because such "boundary markers have been replaced by Christ 'who is all, and is in all' (Col 3:11)."[24] He continues, "The present day phenomenon of widespread segregation in the church along lines of color, culture, and class is at its very core a problem of identity."[25] Elsewhere Stevens strikes the same chord: "Our identity as the New Humanity—not ethnicity, culture, class, or generational preferences—is that

[24]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 176.

[25]Ibid., 222.

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which should have ultimate defining force in determining our group boundaries within the body of Christ."[26] Mono-ethnic churches wrongly create an environment where "ethnicity often becomes the primary defining force of identity."[27] Stevens implies that mono-ethnic churches somehow care more about their heritage than they do about being Christian.

The following will demonstrate that arguments such as these put forward by Stevens fail because they are based on an over-simplified understanding of an individual's identity. This problem arises when someone views identity like multiple slices of a pie chart. Here one piece can get bigger only if another piece gets smaller. Accordingly, the more one values his Christian identity the less he will value his ethnic identity. I intend to show that this is not how Scripture regards man's ethnic identity, which is not in competition with his Christian identity. This conclusion will become apparent through a brief survey of how Paul regarded himself. The apostle offers a clear example of affirming the validity of ethnic identity without diminishing identity in Christ.

Paul, who understood quite well the believer's union with Christ, also identifies himself as a Roman (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-29; cf. 23:27). In Philippians 3:5 Paul identifies himself as a Benjaminite, a Hebrew, and a Pharisee. Although he goes on to say that he considers his former status as "loss," the context reveals that Paul is letting go of his own attempts at self-righteousness (3:6-10). He is not relinquishing these other identities, any more than he is relinquishing his circumcision on the eighth day (3:5). In fact, he goes on to affirm his status as an Israelite who has a special love for his own

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[26]David Stevens, "God's New Humanity," *Unity in Christ Magazine*, January 30, 2012, accessed April 6, 2012, http://unityinchristmagazine.com/theology/god%E2%80%99s-new-humanity/.

[27]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 176. In these references Stevens does not cite any specific author or church that thinks wrongly about ethnicity. He simply objects to the notion that some people or churches exalt ethnic identity over Christian identity. But against whom is Stevens really arguing? What Christian author, church growth expert, or pastor is claiming that one's ethnic identity is more important than his Christian identity? Who even remotely suggests that being in Christ is subservient to being Hispanic or Korean or white? Stevens' concern pretends to be preserving a Christ-centered perspective, but in reality he has simply built a straw man.

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people (Rom 9:1-3). Indeed, he is still a Hebrew, an Israelite and a descendant of

Abraham (2 Cor 11:22). Paul's comfort with using these labels shows he believed

someone could be fully in Christ and still have other identities. His conversion united

him to Christ, but it did not disunite him from his other identity markers. He did not

understand his Jewish or Roman identity to be non-important after he became a Christian.

Barreto makes a strong case for Paul's dual identities based on Acts 16. This

chapter records Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy, the son of Jewish mother and

Greek father.[28] Later Paul is arrested for upsetting the business of a man who profited

from a slave-girl possessed with an evil spirit, whom Paul cast out. The magistrates lay

the following charge at Paul and Silas: "'These *men are Jews*, and they are disturbing our

city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as *Romans* to accept or practice'"

(16:20-21). In other words, Paul is a Jew, an outsider, and Romans know better than to

upset people like this.

Later Paul finds himself in prison, and instead of being released quietly, he

wants to face the magistrate and get an apology. So the apostle appeals to his Roman

identity (16:37-38). But Paul is not just invoking his Roman citizenship to insist on his

political rights, according to Barreto. More so, the apostle recalls his Roman status to

claim that he *is* Roman. His Roman citizenship is not just something that Paul has; it is

something that he is. This distinction is significant because, again, the accusation laid on

Paul in 16:21 is that he is not acting like a good Roman, for a good Roman—according to

Paul's accusers—would not cause an uproar in the city and teach customs contrary to the

norm. But Paul's response is that he is, in fact, a Roman. His argument is not mainly

legal, but ethnic—Paul is Roman, *and* Jewish. Therefore, when Paul claims he is Roman,

he is not just saving face as he exits the prison; he is undercutting the accusation thrown

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[28]Hence, Timothy had dual identities.

at him. His Christian identity and Roman identity "are not at odds."[29] The two co-exist without competition.

Luke includes these encounters to reveal that Luke is interested in showing that believers have dual identities.[30] Being a follower of Christ does not detract from one's ethnic identity.[31] Many who acknowledge the legitimacy of mono-ethnic churches do so because they understand just how important Christian identity is, and they want to remove cultural barriers that stand in the way of people coming to Christ.

These cultural identities matter on Sunday morning because worship practices tap into the core of someone's identity. Johnson's qualitative analysis of the reasons why many African Americans attend African American churches illustrates this point well:

> The impression by many in the Black community is that the RR [racial reconciliation] movement fails to create unity and unintentionally promotes subordination. It devalues previous and authentic cultural worship of God. A multicultural church can experience a form of a particular culture of worship, but rarely is that form truly expressed as in its monocultural setting. Pastor Eric Moore explains why there is a need for Black monocultural fellowships.
> "A significant part of the Black (or African American community has found its identity in the Black church. A Black person may work or live in a multicultural environment, but that same person still finds his/her identity in the Black culture. Since church deals with the core of who a person is, Blacks tend to want to sing black, worship black, talk black, complain black and relate black. They don't want the non-black culture changing what is a core value to them."[32]

In the end, placing an ethnic identity against identity in Christ is like pitting Christianity against Father's Day. A man can have an identity as a Christian without

[29]Eric D. Barreto, "Theology and Ethnicity in the Acts of the Apostles," *Word and World* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 135-36.

[30]Eric D. Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations: The Function of Race and Ethnicity in Acts 16* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 186.

[31]Another example of Christians retaining their ethnic identities is found in Col 4:9, where Paul reminds his readers that Onesimus is "one of you" (Bruce Hansen, *'All of You Are One': The Social Vision of Gal 3.28, 1 Cor 12.13 and Col 3.11*, ed. Mark Goodacre [New York: T&T Clark, 2010] 189).

[32]Dirke D. Johnson, "Multicultural and Racial Reconciliation Efforts Fail to Attract Many in the Black Church," *Great Commission Research Journal* 2, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 224. Johnson is quoting Eric Moore from personal correspondence, October 2010. Moore is Senior Pastor of Tree of Life Bible Fellowship in Detroit.

having any less of an identity as a father because these identities operate on different planes. To affirm one more is not to affirm the other less.

Contextualization

One of the most compelling reasons to affirm the validity of mono-ethnic churches is that they reap the benefits of biblical contextualization.[33] Flemming defines contextualization as

> the dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation. This happens in such a way that the gospel both comes to authentic expression in the local context and at the same time prophetically transforms the context. Contextualization seeks to enable the people of God to live out the gospel in obedience to Christ within their own cultures and circumstances.[34]

The goal of contextualization "is to enable, insofar as humanly possible, an understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, is authentically experienced in each and every human situation."[35] In other words, proper contextualization seeks to implant biblical thinking and biblical acting in diverse contexts. Contextualization does not just relate to minor aspects of how a church orders itself, issues like music and clothing.

> Contextualization is also comprehensive. It takes place at many levels: evangelism, preaching, Bible translation, hermeneutics, theologizing, discipleship, Christian ethics and social involvement, worship, church structures and leadership, and theological education among them. In short, it has to do with the mission of the church in the broadest sense.[36]

How a church contextualizes itself will impact the entire life of the congregation. It cannot be reduced to one leader, one practice, or one moment in the worship service.

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[33]The discussion that follows on contextualization will not reference the debates in missiology about the C-scale. When I call for full contextualization, I am not referring to or supporting C-5/6 or insider movements.

[34]Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 19.

[35]Dean Gilliland, "Contextualization," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions,* ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 225.

[36]Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 20.

When missionaries and evangelists are able to contextualize their message, the response is usually greater because there will be fewer linguistic and cultural obstacles to overcome. The lack of contextualization creates confusion. Scripture confirms this intuition. Paul reveals his missionary strategy in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22:

> For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

The apostle's strategy is evident as he approached different audiences in different ways on his missionary journeys. Flemming's analysis of three of Paul's sermons (Acts 13:13-52; 14:8-20; 17:16-34) reveals how the apostle preaches the same gospel in different ways in order to accommodate his changing audience.[37] Paul varied his approach because he knew different contexts required different tactics; he understood the effectiveness of contextualization.

The primary observation I wish to make about this familiar topic is that Paul did not become all things to all people *at the same time*. When with Jews, he spoke from the OT to prove Jesus was the Messiah. When with Gentiles, he might use Greek poets to illustrate his critique of idols. But Paul is not talking about using two different models in the same situation. For this reason, mono-ethnic churches provide more hope for robust contextualization than multi-ethnic churches.

Multi-ethnic churches attempt to be all things to all people in the same church at the same time. But even the most culturally aware congregation can cater to the preferences of only one group at any given time. When a second-generation, bi-lingual Korean worships in a multi-ethnic church, he is on the receiving end of a contextualized ministry only when it is his turn to sing in Korean, be taught by a Korean and eat kimchi

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[37]Ibid., 56-88.

at the fellowship meal.[38] The rest of the time he is participating in the life of the church,

but he is in a culturally foreign context. If this individual were in a Korean congregation,

he would experience contextualized ministry all the time. Not only would this individual

experience fewer obstacles in his Christian journey, but this Korean church would be

more effective at reaching unbelieving Koreans in that area. I am not arguing that Paul's

model of contextualization implies all churches should be mono-ethnic. Instead,

Scripture upholds contextualized ministry as beneficial, and I propose that mono-ethnic

churches are one very helpful way to tap into this benefit.

Proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate do not see it this way, because some

do not think Paul's example of contextualization provides a model for the church.

DeYmaz observes there is a fundamental difference in what Paul did and what the church

does:

> Paul states his clear intention that his own targeting of specific people groups is for
> the purpose of evangelism.
> To be clear, Paul's homogeneous focus for the purpose of evangelism should
> be contrasted with his multi-ethic understanding of local church planting, growth
> and development.[39]

DeYmaz recognizes the value of contextualized evangelism.   A church may choose to

start a Hispanic outreach at a nearby college. This ministry style is acceptable.

But the multi-ethnic mandate prohibits that same church from planting a

Hispanic church. Highly contextualized ministry is what missionaries and evangelists do,

and DeYmaz maintains that homogeneous *outreach* is a biblically valid way of reaching

others: "But things change once we commit ourselves to planting or developing a local

church."[40] Contextualization makes for good missiology but not good ecclesiology.[41]

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[38]Yet even these three efforts at contextualization do not amount to full contextualization.

[39]Mark DeYmaz, *Should Pastors Accept or Reject the Homogeneous Unit Principle?* (Little Rock, AR: The Mosaix Global Network, 2011), 18, accessed March 22, 2012, http://www.mosaix.info/ Resources/hup.

[40]Ibid., 19. DeYmaz's church in Little Rock offers language-specific worship services with the goal of bringing worshippers into the multi-ethnic worship service. He offers two reasons: "First, it is for

In view of DeYmaz's position, the pressing question is whether Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 is simply reporting his own missionary strategy or if he is also instructing his readers—at least implicitly—to contextualize likewise. Carson rightly observes that the purpose of Paul highlighting his efforts in contextualization is to illustrate the priority of self-denial. Paul demonstrates self-denial by giving up his rights to observe the Law, or not observe the law, when he contextualized his ministry. Self-denial for the good of others is the precise point Paul wants to press home to his readers.[42]

While teaching self-denial may have been Paul's main point, I also want to point out four strands of evidence that support the idea that contextualization is not reserved just for missionaries and evangelists, but it is also important for a church as a whole. DeYmaz's ministry model is that it is okay to have homogeneity in outreach but not in the church.[43] But if the points below are persuasive, DeYmaz's distinction between homogeneous outreach and heterogeneous church gatherings fails.

First, basic observation shows that contextualization cannot be limited to outreach and evangelism. If a church planter does contextualized evangelism for six months (which DeYmaz says is acceptable and wise), what will be the result? Ideally

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the purpose of building relationships and evangelism—to share the gospel in a way that is most accessible to the 1.0s we are trying to reach: and second, to establish an initial level of comfort for internationals who are coming to Christ through our witness and into the church who are not yet fluent in the language or culture of the United States" (ibid. 27).

[41]Ibid., 23. Stevens also sees a distinction between homogeneous outreach and heterogeneous church life: "While particular ethnicities, cultures, ages, and even genders may be the focus of evangelistic initiatives (cf. 1 Cor 9:20-23) or initial discipleship, immediate steps must be taken to help these young believers understand their New Humanity identity and associate with a local church that embraces such diversity in unity" (Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 155).

[42]David Carson [D. A. Carson], "Pauline Inconsistency: Reflections on 1 Corinthians 9.19-23 and Galatians 2.11-14," *Churchman* 100, no. 1 (1986): 16.

[43]Cf. DeYmaz, *Ethnic Blends*, 107-11. DeYmaz argues for "graduated inclusion" of minorities into the life of a multi-ethnic church. Within this model his church offers some ethnic-specific worship services that serve as initial gateways into the life and culture of the church, but he insists that he would not plant an ethnic-specific church.

there will be some converts who all know each other, share many things in common and want to grow in the Lord together. There will be a church. Evangelism creates churches. Thus, contextualized evangelism creates contextualized churches. So, when DeYmaz parses between evangelizing one way and organizing a church another way, he is making a semantic distinction that does not exist in reality. His conclusion also misses the missiological character of the church. If contextualized evangelism is acceptable, and if the church's corporate witness has an evangelistic impact, then it follows that a church can contextualize itself for one particular people group.

Second, Paul seems to be instructing his Corinthian readers to imitate his practice. He commands his readers, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (11:1). The apostle probably is not just talking about his good character that needs to be imitated, but he is particularly referring to his efforts not to offend others. In the verse preceding he writes, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved" (10:32-33). Paul's call not to offend mirrors his effort to contextualize, for contextualization seeks to remove unnecessary offense. Blomberg points out that the reference to Jews, Greeks and the church in 10:32-33 correspond to those under the Law, not under the law, and the weak in 9:19-22.[44] Thus, as Paul calls his readers not to offend, he is calling them to contextualize their lives and their message. Furthermore, Paul directly states that the goal of contextualization in 9:19-22 is that many might be won. The goal of not giving offense in 10:32-33 is that many may be saved. Paul seems to have the same idea in mind. Altogether, there is a rather clear link between 10:32-33 and 9:19-22. In the latter passage, Paul simply describes his missionary strategy, but in the former passage he calls for his readers to imitate his approach. Paul is

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[44]Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 184.

calling them to go out of their way to remove distractions from the core of the gospel message. In short, Paul expects the church to contextualize.

Third, 9:19-22 does not just relate to evangelism and outreach. The third group Paul mentions are "the weak." Carson indicates that Paul is probably referring the believers already mentioned in the letter who have weak consciences regarding meat sacrificed to idols.[45] Paul uses the word "weak" five times in 8:7-12 to identify Christians in Corinth who do not fully understand their dietary freedom. Paul also uses "weak" to refer to believers in Romans 14:1-2. If Paul has Christians in mind when he refers the weak in 1 Corinthians 9:22, then "win" must have a broader meaning than conversion. Surely "winning others to Christ" is part of what Paul has in view in 9:19-22, but it cannot be limited to that. Winning more likely refers to persuasion in a broad sense, including both evangelism and Christian growth. For this reason, it is appropriate to apply the contextualization principles of 9:19-22 to matters of missiology *and* ecclesiology.

Fourth, Paul clearly is willing to contextualize when ministering to the church. In Acts 21:17-26 Paul has returned to Jerusalem to find a group of converted Jews who still hold the Law in high regard. This group also has a warped view of Paul's ministry and teaching, believing that Paul instructed Jews not to follow the Law. Paul's response, at the advice of James, is to participate in the purification rites of four men who were under a Jewish vow. His actions serve to prove his Jewish credentials and his willingness for Jews to continue to follow the Law. Although the plan does not pacify the Jewish mob that arrests Paul anyway, this passage is a clear example of Paul becoming like those under the Law so that he could win those under the Law. Significantly, he employs this principle not in an evangelistic setting but a discipleship setting. He contextualizes for

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[45]Carson, "Pauline Inconsistency," 14-15.

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the church.[46] Milne, a proponent of the multi-ethnic mandate, sees Paul's

contextualization to Jews in Jerusalem in this passage as the result of the unfortunate

reality that the first generation of Christians did not fully grasp the importance of multi-

ethnicity in the church. The older models of homogeneity persisted for a time, he

argues.[47] Such a conclusion reveals how far some interpreters will go to hold on to their

multi-ethnic ideal. Milne is quite interested in citing Pauline passages when they seem to

support his thesis, but he then dismisses Paul's conduct as non-instructive for the church

when it opposes his thesis.

Scripture reveals other instances where contextualization impacts the church.

Paul circumcises Timothy at the start of their second missionary journey "because of the

Jews who were in those places" (Acts 16:3). The context reveals that the Jews about

which Paul is concerned are most likely Jews in the churches that Paul, Silas and

Timothy are about to visit (16:4-5). Here again Paul places himself under the Law

(contextualizing his ministry) for the purposes of church unity, not simply evangelism.

Another pertinent example is how Paul gives different groups different instructions. Paul

instructs believers in the Jerusalem Council, Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 how to

avoid offense in the church related to diet, but his specific advice changes based on his

audience. Thus, his teaching for the church was contextualized.

In summary, all aspects of the church, not just its outreach arms, can benefit

from contextualization. Outreach ministries aim to see conversions. Corporate church

services also should be concerned with seeing conversion (1 Cor 14:23-25). Both groups

want to make disciples, so it is no surprise that Scripture permits both to use similar

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[46]Paul may have also observed the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6). Stevens argues, "Paul's ultimate intention . . . is to eradicate spiritual as well as ethnic and cultural distance between Jew and Gentile" (Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 101). But the apostle's willingness to participate in Jewish customs shows that Stevens is mistaken.

[47]Bruce Milne, *Dynamic Diversity: Bridging Class, Age, Race and Gender in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 23.

(contextualized) methods. In this way the church will reach people the same way they will grow them in the faith.

Finally, an investigation into the nature of contextualization reveals another important point that is relevant to the multi-ethnic church: relating well to everyone in a multi-ethnic setting is nearly impossible. When Christians from different ethnic backgrounds disagree on a church related issue, compromise is sometimes possible. When it comes to what kind of food is served at the potluck, a church can provide multiple options. A similar compromise can be achieved on music styles, with one song in a one style/language and the next song in a different style/language. One culture may esteem pastors who are well-dressed. Another culture may embrace more casual teachers, and a teacher could alternate his dress each week to fit the preferences of the many.

But some matters do not have a happy middle. One culture's sense of time could be highly punctual; another culture's view of time may be more relaxed. One culture may prefer short sermons and a little singing; others may prefer a worship service that extends well into Sunday afternoon. One culture may struggle to trust young pastors; others may quickly embrace them. One culture may be highly logical; another may rely more on intuition. One culture may have a different cleanliness standard than another. One culture may treat church finances (including who gives what) as public information; another culture may have a high sense of privacy. One culture may expect a lot of emotion in preaching. Another ethnicity may feel more at home in a more reserved context. In each of these examples, compromise is impossible. No single church can accommodate both preferences. It will either do it one way or do it another way. Once a church makes one of these decisions, it prefers one group over another. There is no such thing as a culture-free gospel presentation where all preferences are laid aside.[48] The

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[48]Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Driven Ministry in Your City*

same way electricity needs a wire for it to travel from one point to the next, Christian

truth is communicated through culture, not despite culture. Every group or teacher is

always appealing to a particular audience and distancing itself from another audience.

While one group can try to bend toward the culture norms of a different group, man's

ability to see the world through an alternative cultural lens is limited.

This is because one's culture impacts nearly every facet of his or her life.

Keller rightly observes how deeply culture affects everyone:

> It determines how decisions are made, how emotions are expressed, what is
> considered private and public, how the individual relates to the group, how social
> power is used, and how relationships, particularly between genders, generations,
> classes and races, are conducted. Our culture gives distinct understandings of time,
> conflict resolution, problem solving, and even the way in which we reason. All
> these factors must be addressed when we seek to do gospel ministry.[49]

If cultural differences mark individuals so deeply, then churches cannot meaningfully

engage in ministry across cultural lines simply by translating the language or adjusting

their music, diet or dress code. Wanting to be ethnically diverse and having the spiritual

readiness to do so does not mean someone is able to pull it off. McIntosh and McMahan

recognize the difficulty of various ethnicities coming together for worship:

> To really operate a church that gives room for unique expressions of each of these
> groups is beyond the capacity of most congregations. As a means of managing the
> overwhelming complexity of cultural variations, most congregations, even if they
> aspire to be culturally sensitive, simply give a nod to cultural variations of their
> members. . . . Ultimately, most multicultural churches develop a monocultural
> pattern of life, in which each distinct ethnic group blends into some common
> denominator, essentially making the church monocultural.[50]

Even the church that wishes it really were relevant to all people is

contextualizing to only a particular slice of the population. But mono-ethnic churches, on

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(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 93-97. The discussion above about contextualization speaks of it as a strategy that ministers self-consciously seek to employ. The danger of talking about "deciding" to contextualize is it insinuates someone else can decide not to contextualize. The truth is that everyone appeals to one context over another, so every Christian contextualizes. It is impossible not to do so (ibid).

[49]Ibid., 90.

[50]McIntosh and McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community,* 26.

the other hand, are contextualized by default. While they ought to make an effort to reach out to everyone in their area, they are well-suited to reach out to others who are like them, with the hope that they might, by all means, win some.

Natural Connectedness in Acts

This section will survey the book of Acts in an attempt to show how God often meets individuals where they are with respect to their ethnic, linguistic and family backgrounds. Ethnic, linguistic and family relations are areas of natural connectedness. People who share one or all of the traits normally have more in common than those who do not; they are naturally connected by these characteristics given to them at birth. Stevens contends that natural factors such as these should not be the basis for biblical community. Instead, the supernatural factor (the Holy Spirit) is the only basis for biblical community.[51] My hope is to demonstrate that Stevens is making a false dichotomy. Instead, the Spirit utilizes these natural ways individuals are connected to expand the kingdom.

Chapter 3 already mentioned two forms of natural connectedness found in Acts. First, those filled with the Spirit at Pentecost spoke in languages native to those who had come to Jerusalem. Here the Spirit is concerned to create a natural point of contact by allowing everyone to hear the gospel in their heart language. Second, the original seven men elected to serve Hellenistic widows were Hellenists themselves. Their ministry seemingly was enhanced by the shared culture they had with the overlooked widows. Three additional areas of natural connectedness in Acts relate to missionary travels, missionary gifts, and household conversions.

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[51]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 129. In his list of "natural factors" Stevens mentions "ethnicity, culture, language, or socioeconomic conditions" (ibid). This project is built around the understanding that economic diversity is healthy and expected in a local church, even if linguistic and ethnic diversity are not. For a brief explanation of why I think this is a consistent position, see chap. 5.

Missionary Travels and Family Relations

As soon as the gospel begins to spread beyond the borders of Israel, Acts offers several hints that the gospel is expanding along familial lines. Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch then continues to preach Christ until he gets to Caesarea (8:40). The next reference to Philip is in 21:8, when Paul and his companions stayed in his home in Caesarea. This reference suggests Caesarea may have been Philip's hometown from the beginning, which would explain why that was his destination in 8:40.[52]

The destination of missionaries in Acts often seems influenced by family connections. After Saul's conversion and brief ministry in Jerusalem, the saints send him to Tarsus, his hometown (9:30; cf. 11:25). As Paul and Barnabas depart on their initial missionary journey from Antioch, they go first to Cyprus, Barnabas' hometown (13:4; cf. 4:36). While in Cyprus they see the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the Roman official in charge of the island (13:7). When Paul and Barnabas leave Cyprus, they head for Antioch in Pisidia (13:14). Interestingly, Sergius Paulus has family in Antioch, so he may have asked Paul to go there or may have paid for the next leg of Paul's trip.[53] Later, when Paul and Barnabas part ways over John Mark, Barnabas and John Mark return to Cyprus to do ministry (15:39). John Mark and Barnabas were cousins (Col 4:10), which means they probably were both from Cyprus—again going to their hometown.

In each of these examples, the destination of missionary activity appears to be influenced by family connections. This observation should not cause anyone to overlook the many times the gospel reaches areas where there apparently is no family connection.

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[52]Certainly it remains possible that Philip had no prior connection to Caesarea and that he simply settled there after preaching the gospel there. One difficulty with this reasoning, though, is that it does not explain why the traveling evangelist stops in Caesarea.

[53]Witherington favors this view. Sergius Paulus' family owned a large estate in central Asia Minor, near Pisidian Antioch. This factor could have influence Paul's decision to head for Pisidian Antioch: "It is quite possible that the reason Paul and Barnabas went off to Pisidian Antioch, which is not necessarily the most obvious choice for the next place to evangelize, is that Sergius Paulus, who had family connections in that region, suggested it. Perhaps he wrote a letter of recommendation for Paul and Barnabas to aid them along the way" (Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 403-4).

Nor does this observation trump the over-arching theme of Acts, which is that the message of Christ is for all peoples, not just the Jews and not just one's own family. Nevertheless, the examples cited above are multiple and intriguing. Apparently God directed the affairs of the church's earliest missionaries, in part, through the natural family connections they already had. Family connections could have provided favorable lodging circumstances, or they may have given the missionaries inside knowledge of the culture in a particular area, causing them to go there first.

Missionary Gifts

Another example of natural connectedness in Acts relates to the giftedness of Paul and Timothy. Both had backgrounds that uniquely suited them for their callings. As an educated Roman and a devout Jew, Paul was uniquely suited for his ministry.[54] Often Paul was addressing a synagogue during the first half of the day and a Greek audience during the second half. Having a foot in both worlds equipped him to be able to relate to his audiences well. Timothy, with a Greek father and Jewish mother (16:4), was well suited to be Paul's companion. Such cultural flexibility is the mark of a gifted missionary or church planter.

It is noteworthy that God seems to make certain people missionaries when they have natural backgrounds that match the backgrounds of the unbelievers they are trying to reach. Paul understood that his audience needed someone who could relate to them, so he picked Timothy. God knew the same, so he picked Paul. Certainly God can raise up leaders despite their natural qualifications for the job (i.e., Gideon, Judg 6:15). But other times God chooses to call someone who is naturally well-suited to navigate the mores of a social setting. Apparently God is concerned about a missionary's ability to relate well to his audience.

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[54]See J. D. Payne, *Discovering Church Planting: An Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 187-88.

To be sure, the Great Commission requires the gospel to cross ethnic boundaries. Many times this will mean a believer has no natural affinity with those whom he is trying to reach. But the most pertinent question is "Who is doing the boundary crossing in the Bible?" Again and again the mature, gifted believer is the one crossing the cultural divide.[55] Paul and Timothy's background and ministry model this principle. They go out of their way and set aside their freedoms to accommodate their audiences. But in a multi-ethnic church, everyone is crossing an ethnic divide, including visitors and non-Christians, so no one feels "at home." The result is that the unbelieving Chinese man exploring Christianity in a multi-ethnic church has to explore the gospel in a culturally foreign context. It seems that Paul and Timothy's gifts and willingness to adapt suggest there is a better way. God gives only some people the missionary gift. But multi-ethnic churches require, at least to some extent, everyone in the church (including visitors) to sacrifice their cultural preferences in their pursuit of God.

Household Conversions

Probably the clearest examples of God using the natural connectedness in Acts are the household conversions. Household conversions and/or baptisms happen to Cornelius (11:14), Lydia (16:15), the Philippian jailer (16:31-32) and Crispus (18:8). A household in the OT and Hellenistic world would often have extended beyond the immediate family unit. Those who live under the same roof, come under the same authority of the house leader, and depend economically on the same infrastructure would have been considered a household.[56] Aside from the servants that may have been

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[55]I credit this observation to Dr. Chuck Lawless in his colloquium on Urban Evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, December 2010. This observation is particularly informative for the mono-ethnic church that has a desire to reach another ethnicity in its area. If an Anglo congregation wants to see more Hispanic people into their church, the Anglo church needs to be aware that it is probably asking the Hispanic population to sacrifice cultural preferences more than the Anglo church is.

[56]D. G. McCartney, "Household, Family," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 511-12.

included in the household, everyone would have normally shared the same ethnicity, for it is passed on from one generation to the next.[57]

The fact that Luke recounts the household conversions without much ado suggests that the reader should not be surprised that other members of the household imitated the faith of their leader. Solidarity among the household was the byproduct of their kinship, and when the leader began following Jesus, the natural connections each member had to the head of household and to one another were used by the Spirit to facilitate their conversions. Here again, the Spirit uses the natural factors that bind people together to achieve his gospel-centered ends.

The destination of missionary travels, the multi-cultural gifting of missionaries and the household conversions in Acts each reveal how kingdom expansion is linked to the natural connectedness of individuals. The key point here is not simply sociological. I am not just arguing that this is the way the world operates. More than that, I have shown that this is how *God* operates. Jesus saved and called Paul to be a light to the Gentiles (9:15). The Holy Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas for their travels (13:2). Even when the Spirit is not directly mentioned, his presence can be assumed. The Holy Spirit is the agent of salvation in each household conversion. The Spirit's presence at Pentecost overcame ethnic boundaries such that Diaspora Jews would not have to overcome cultural divides (2:1-6).

Padilla disregards the idea that like attracts like: "It may be true that 'men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers,' but that is irrelevant."[58] But apparently it is not irrelevant to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not

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[57]Adoption, migration and inter-racial marriages may create exceptions to this rule. As discussed above, Timothy had a Jewish mother and Greek father, which may have meant his culture was a hybrid of the two. See chap. 3, "Jews and Gentiles Not Always Culturally Distant." Nothing in the household conversions of Acts prohibits a family unit from being multi-ethnic, but this would not have been the norm.

[58]C. René Padilla, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle,"

look upon the natural connectedness of people and run in the opposite direction. The Spirit has no interest in creating diversity for the sake of diversity. Instead, the Spirit seems interested in kingdom expansion, and *he has no problem using the natural connectedness of people to that end*. Herein lies the benefit of the mono-ethnic church: it leverages the natural connectedness of people to advance the gospel further.

An analogy may help crystallize the point. Here is a basic principle—water flows downhill. Imagine a house that sits on the downslope of a large hill. Every time it rains the house collects water in the basement. The owner of the home has at least two options to solve this problem. He can build a wall above the house to dam the water, spending much time bracing the wall and filling in cracks. Or he can dig a canal around the house to redirect water away from the house. Both solutions are built around the understanding that water flows downhill. But the first option tries to stop the water altogether; it tries to resist the principle. The second option uses the principle instead of opposing it, and it creates a more effective solution.

Similarly, Acts affirms the principle that the natural connectedness of people provides channels along which the gospel can most effectively expand. Practitioners can either oppose this principle or use this principle toward gospel ends. Mono-ethnic churches do the latter, and the Spirit's activity in Acts seems to sanction such an approach.

Summary

This chapter maintains that mono-ethnic churches are consistent with biblical values and norms. The Bible values the preservation of culture, and mono-ethnic churches assist greatly in that effort. Similarly, the Bible affirms that believers have dual identities. Christians are both in Christ and members of a particular ethnic group(s). Mono-ethnic churches provide a place where these dual identities can be recognized. The

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International Bulletin of Missionary Research 6, no. 1 (1982): 24.

Bible affirms the value of contextualization, and mono-ethnic churches are places where contextualization does not have to hold back. The Bible shows how the Spirit uses the natural connectedness of people to promote gospel ends, and mono-ethnic churches enable congregations to channel gospel truths along these natural bridges.

Accordingly, mono-ethnic churches should not be dismissed as unbiblical, irrelevant, antiquated, unloving, or as a subtle expression of racism. Instead, they can be legitimate, healthy expressions of the body of Christ because they provide contexts where biblical values are embraced and utilized.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Colleges boast of their diverse student bodies; commercials showcase various ethnicities enjoying the advertised product; television shows rarely have a homogeneous cast. This milieu of diversity in America seems to be everywhere, and it highlights some much needed progress in ethnic relations. But today diversity has become more than a characteristic; it has become a virtue. It is now an end in itself, and I propose that the widespread love of diversity in American culture has affected some corners of Christian theology so much that many accept the multi-ethnic mandate without critical examination.

America's checkered past on ethnic relations also may be bolstering the widespread acceptance of the multi-ethnic mandate, and now the theological pendulum has swung too far in the other direction. In an effort to avoid past wrongs, proponents of the multi-ethnic mandate have created a new one. Some advocates are so passionate about the benefits of multi-ethnic churches that they require all other churches to imitate their model, and in doing so, they overstate their otherwise good point.

DeYmaz and Li warn, "Some people will try to convince you that a multi-ethnic vision is not God's *only* plan for the church but simply one option."[1] They are correct; this has been my goal—to show that a multi-ethnic church is one option for reaching the peoples of the world, but it is not the only option. The thesis defended here seems, to me, very obvious: the Bible does not command churches to be as multi-ethnic

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[1]Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 78, italics theirs.

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as their communities. Churches must always have an open door policy. Churches must

eagerly receive into membership anyone who bears evidence of being a disciple.

Churches must also recognize their responsibilities to take the gospel across cultures, but

they can do that through church planting, church partnering or through becoming more

ethnically diverse. If the natural byproduct of a church's faithful ministry in a diverse

area is that it attracts primarily one ethnic group, then the resulting mono-ethnic church

should not be dismissed as unhealthy.

In this way, multi-ethnic churches are similar to interracial marriages.

Interracial marriages are a good and healthy picture of the gospel, and people have

wrongly opposed them in the past. But the proper way forward on interracial marriage is

certainly not to mandate that all Christians be in one. Instead, Christians should

recognize the benefits of these unions and the freedom to be in them, but if a mono-ethnic

marriage is the natural by-product of two people choosing to marry, so be it. Both kinds

of marriage (and celibacy) glorify God, and it would be wrong to exalt one form of

marriage over others and insist that all Christians live their lives accordingly.

I have arrived at this conclusion by outlining the arguments offered in favor of

the multi-ethnic mandate (chapter 2), refuting those arguments (chapter 3), and then

showing some biblical reasons that mono-ethnic churches are often helpful (chapter 4).

Two of the most salient arguments that deserve repeating relate to Jew/Gentile relations

and contextualization. A primary concern of the NT is demonstrating that Gentiles are

full covenant members apart from the Law. Gentiles do not need to become Jews to

inherit salvation. This soteriological backdrop must influence how one interprets

passages that stress Jew/Gentile unity. Such unity was so important in the NT because

anything less threatened the truth that anybody can be saved apart from the Law. These

passages do not seem to be intended to show that God's will for every church is to

become multi-ethnic, otherwise Paul probably would have spent more time talking about

the various ethnic groups in Ephesus, Rome and so on.[2] Instead, he majors on

Jew/Gentile relations because Jews struggled to understand the glory of the new covenant

where God's chosen people now come from all nations, not just Israel. I am not aware of

any Christian from any ethnic group that claims that God is willing to receive only those

who take on his particular ethnic identity. Jew/Gentile relations, therefore, do not

correspond to ethnic distinctions today, and passages that emphasize Jew/Gentile oneness

do not support the multi-ethnic mandate.

Contextualization is the process of removing barriers to the gospel so that a

given culture can hear, consider and obey the gospel without undue influence from

outside cultures. Mono-ethnic churches are more equipped than multi-ethnic churches to

contextualize the Christian faith for a particular people. Anthony Bradley points out that

Christians from the majority culture are often unaware how their culture influences their

worship practices: "Racial reconciliation misunderstands homogeneous ethnic churches

as outmoded. This, in part, has much to do with many whites denying that they have

cultural norms and the failure to recognize that ethnic minorities do need cultural centers

for survival."[3] When one ethnic group does not recognize how its practices are

influenced by its culture, this is a failure in contextualization. An Anglo church may

know that its form of praying is biblically permissible; therefore (it thinks) this form

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[2]For instance, Ephesus was a cosmopolitan city. The original inhabitants were from Ionia, Lydia, Phyrgia, Caria, and Mysia, but Ephesus also had residents from Greece, Egypt, Rome and Israel. Evidence from inscriptions reveals that many in the upper class and in governmental affairs were foreigners (Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 30-31). However, Paul does not draw attention to these different people groups when he pens his epistle to the Ephesians. His focus on Jew/Gentile unity reveals that he seems to have a different agenda than the establishment of a multi-ethnic church in Ephesus.

[3]Anthony Bradley, "Moving Toward Racial Solidarity," *World Magazine*, September 7, 2011, accessed February 21, 2012, http://www.worldmag.com/2011/09/moving_toward_racial_solidarity. Bradley emphasizes the need for churches to understand white privilege. Significantly, Bradley does not counter white privilege simply with multi-ethnic churches, but he maintains that ethnically similar churches are necessary to counter-act the effects of white privilege: "Because of white hegemony, homogeneous ethnic churches provide a safe haven for minorities in a dominant culture that demands conformity to social customs and norms that are not their own" (ibid).

should be relevant to all cultures. In reality, it may not be. An Anglo church may have one person lead in prayer while the congregants pray along silently in their seats. Some prayers are formal and guided by a liturgy; others are extemporaneous. Korean Christians have the habit of praying out loud at the same time.[4] Some Palestinian and Arab Christians incorporate certain postures into their prayers.[5] One person's "biblical form" of praying is also a culturally informed mode of praying, which makes contextualization all the more important. Hence, mono-ethnic churches play a key role in the kingdom of God because they are able to contextualize well, which enables them to preserve cultures rather than lead to assimilation. The irony of the multi-ethnic mandate is that its adherents often pursue multi-ethnicity out of love for minorities, yet the churches they strive to create end up being less loving than mono-ethnic churches because they ask minorities to conform to the majority (often subconsciously) in matters of non-essentials.

As straightforward as this thesis is, I hesitate to offer it. I fear that it will be misinterpreted as some sort of endorsement of separate but equal churches, or that Christians do not need to do the hard work of loving people who are different from themselves, or that preferring one's own interests is acceptable. My hope is not to encourage churches to care only about a target audience, nor do I believe that all churches really just need to be mono-ethnic to keep ministry from being messy. I too cringe at the thought of churches that are subtle expressions of racism, that do not eagerly welcome outsiders, or that value quick and easy church growth above biblical fidelity. But these

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[4]Chul Tim Chang, "Korean Ethnic Church Growth Phenomenon in the United States," a paper presented at the American Academy of Religion in Claremont, CA, March 12, 2006, accessed July 19, 2014, http://people.duke.edu/~myhan/kaf0603.pdf, 5-6. Chang's article surveys the Korean church phenomenon in America and lists several common characteristics of Korean churches, and praying out loud simultaneously is one of them. He notes that most Korean born Americans want to be in a Korean church. This observation provides evidence that mono-ethnic churches should not just be limited to first generation immigrants.

[5]Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 188.

are not necessary motives behind what I am proposing. Despite these concerns of misinterpretation, I feel compelled to articulate what is in the Bible and what is not in the Bible, and the multi-ethnic mandate is not.

Some object to mono-ethnic churches by highlighting how Scripture calls believers to overcome class divisions. Both Milne and Metzger's works are efforts to introduce all forms of diversity into the church—with ethnic diversity being one of them.[6] But a closer examination of Scripture reveals that one cannot lump ethnic diversity into the same category as economic diversity, because ethnic differences are of a different nature than class differences.

Ethnic diversity was intended by God (see chapter 4); poverty is the result of the fall. Ethnic diversity will be preserved in heaven; poverty will not. One's ethnicity is rather fixed throughout one's life, but his or her socioeconomic status may fluctuate. Ethnicity impacts how a church sings, preaches, prays, resolves conflict, dresses, eats, leads—it impacts all of church life. Yet someone's socioeconomic status relates to a much smaller slice of the church's mission. Ethnic diversity is not present in all communities. Economic diversity is present almost everywhere. When Jesus instructed the church to make disciples, he categorized all of humanity according to people groups, which suggests that these are the natural lines of division of mankind. Most importantly, Scripture assumes that NT churches will include the rich and poor, but I have shown it does not make similar assumptions about different ethnicities. Thus, the position defended here—that churches need to be economically diverse but do not have to be ethnically diverse—is consistent and biblical.[7]

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[6]See Bruce Milne, *Dynamic Diversity: Bridging Class, Age, Race and Gender in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), and Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[7]I offer these thoughts with full recognition that ethnic diversity and economic diversity are often linked in America. My hope has been to allow Scripture to lead where it leads, even if the final destination is difficult to apply in today's context.

Another helpful consideration at the close of this study is to consider what is at stake in this debate. At one point in my investigation of the multi-ethnic mandate I hypothesized that those committed to it were mistaken, but no real harm comes from believing that this is what the Bible teaches. I was wrong. Even if there were no visible consequences, making Scripture command something that it does not mandate is a grave error. A commitment to the multi-ethnic mandate can also lead to a sense of failure when ethnic diversity is not achieved. It can also foster guilt when people choose to join a mono-ethnic church because they feel it will be a good place for them spiritually. The multi-ethnic mandate can lead to strange exegesis, as interpreters find multi-ethnic overtones where they are not intended.[8] It can cause a church to have a one-size-fits-all mentality, which may prevent a congregation from seeing the strategic value in planting a church with an orientation toward a certain ethnic group.

A member of a church that ardently embraces the multi-ethnic mandate may feel like he is not participating in the vision of the church if all of his evangelistic relationships are within his own ethnic group. Such a focus can also bring undue attention to minorities, causing them to feel like they are wanted primarily for the diversity they bring to the table; or it can cause majority culture believers to feel like they are not valued as much.[9] The multi-ethnic mandate has the potential to confuse the distinction between a pastor and a missionary, because it effectively turns every pastor into a cross-cultural missionary—despite his gift set.[10] One of the greatest dangers of

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[8]See DeYmaz's discussion on Rev 2:5, where he argues that the "first love" that was lost in Ephesus was the love of multi-ethnicity (Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007], 35-37).

[9]DeYmaz confesses, "In the early days of our church plant, some of our people would count heads in the service, not so much to chart attendance but the diversity of the crowd from week to week. And I must admit to being one of them. We were concerned that the involvement of too many white people might inhibit the establishment of a truly diverse congregation. Fortunately, it did not" (Mark DeYmaz, "Beyond Percentages" *Outreach Magazine*, May/June 2010, 112).

[10]To successfully integrate a church, Edwards explains, "Whites and racial minorities will have to resist white normativity and structural dominance and fully embrace the culture, ideas, and perspectives

believing that all churches have to be multi-ethnic is that it can cause believers to look down on homogeneous churches.[11] The most passionate defenders of the multi-ethnic mandate sometimes find racism where it does not necessarily exist.[12] One of the more alarming abuses of the multi-ethnic mandate is when a multi-ethnic church pastor actually rebuked white people in his congregation for bringing other white people to church, believing they should have been more faithful in multi-ethnic outreach.[13] While

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of all racial groups. Otherwise, the dream will remain elusive" (Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial* Churches [New York: Oxford, 2008],140). Here Edwards essentially argues that Christians need to possess the skill set of cross-cultural missionaries if they are going to see their church become multi-ethnic.

[11]Woo admits how members of his church began to look down on other homogeneous congregations: "Some of our members attest to the fact that when they now visit homogeneous churches, they feel very uncomfortable and question what is wrong with the church or why our church is so different" (Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* [Nashville: B&H, 2009], 31).

[12]See, for instance, Metzger, *Consuming Jesus*, 78; A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God: How Revelation and Redemption Lead to Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 131. Stevens unfortunately offers another example of implying that a subtle form of racism is at the root of mono-ethnic ministry: "What makes racial divisions so subtly powerful in American society today is that they are frequently fueled by deeply imbedded, covert, nearly invisible attitudes and values that are far more palatable and politically correct than the overt racism of bygone days. In other words, our prejudices *are* enforced against others, but in more subtle and sometimes unconscious expressions that are more difficult to identify. Contemporary racism is *adapted* to the times in which it manifests itself. It manifested itself in one way in the slave culture of the 1800s, in another way during the period of Jim Crow segregation, and now in much more subtle but equally lethal forms in the post-Civil Rights era. Practices that produce racial division in the United States today are increasingly covert, embedded in normal operations of institutions, without direct racial terminology, and invisible to most whites" (David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012], 17-18). The context of this statement reveals that ethnically similar churches are the "covert" forms of racism Stevens has in mind. In other words, what slavery and Jim Crow were centuries and decades ago, mono-ethnic churches are today. This comparison is absolutely ridiculous. It is one thing to pass laws that discriminate against someone or to participate in practices that dehumanize others. It is an entirely different thing if churches wind up attracting people similar to their own ethnicity. These comparisons cast themselves as insightful observations about the evolution of a problem in America that has a common denominator, but in reality they are thoughtless comparisons that, whether intentionally or not, cast undue shame on mono-ethnic ministries.

[13]This example does not come from a fringe representative of the multi-ethnic mandate. Leonce Crump is an Acts 29 church planter in Atlanta. The following statement came from his biblical defense of the multi-ethnic mandate at one of the largest multi-ethnic church conferences in the nation. He recalled at the conference what he had previously said to his congregation: "[I was] preaching on mission, and I stopped in the middle and I looked at my congregation and I told our young, upwardly mobile, some college students, some young professional white congregants, 'Do not bring another white person here. Don't do it. Your street: 60 percent African American. You are choosing, you are choosing, to disregard your neighbor for the sake of comfort and the identity that you lean into. So I don't want to see another frat brother, sorority sister, former classmate, blonde-haired buddy that you used to drink with on the

none of these downsides is a necessary implication of the multi-ethnic mandate, the potential is there, and advocates of the multi-ethnic mandate have even acknowledged that many of them happen.

If this dissertation is correct and the multi-ethnic mandate is not biblical, the mono-ethnic church in a multi-ethnic community still has to decide what ministry will look like. Should it be content to stay mono-ethnic, or should it strive to be multi-ethnic, simply with the awareness that Scripture does not require that outcome? The very point of this project is to show that churches have freedom in how they answer that question.

Yet I will offer two basic recommendations. First, churches should weigh the benefits of multi-ethnic churches against the challenges of multi-ethnic churches. A multi-ethnic community may have experienced enough assimilation that a multi-ethnic church is very feasible and that the benefits of one outweigh the challenges.[14] Second, churches should reach out indiscriminately. In multi-ethnic communities, this will mean outreach efforts will regularly try to cross ethnic lines. After a season of ministry, believers should take a sober assessment of who is being reached. If a growing church with faithful outreach finds that certain ethnicities are generally not being converted and growing as disciples, then this is a significant clue that cultural differences may be hindering kingdom expansion. In this situation, a church may decide it can alter its worship and structure and staff sufficiently to shorten the cultural distance between the two ethnicities. But it should not imagine that it can fully close the gap, and the majority culture must make these changes while considering the spiritual condition and cultural adaptability of the rest of the congregation. If such efforts are unsuccessful in reaching

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weekend—don't bring another one here. I'd rather you not bring anybody than to bring another one here and call it mission'" (Leonce Crump, "Beyond Diversity: The Transcultural Narrative of the Scripture," Speech presented at Mosaix Global Conference, November 6, 2013, accessed February 23, 2013, http://www.mosaix2013.com/Tracks/track01#.U2Bg1yDD_IU).

[14]This situation may especially be common in some urban areas where different ethnicities begin to share a common city culture.

the otherwise unreached population segments, churches should consider planting a church geared toward a certain ethnicity, or they should seek to partner with an existing church that is better equipped to reach that ethnicity.[15] Those churches whose polities allow for multiple services or campuses may find it beneficial to start a separate worship service that has a different format. In short, churches should reach out to all, and when they encounter barriers that are not intrinsic to the gospel, they should consider other options.

Further research is needed in a few areas connected to this project. Chapter 3 gave a cursory look at the cultural distance between first-century Jews and Gentiles. The problem is that there is quite a bit of variety in how culturally similar or distant Jews and Gentiles of antiquity were. A study that would either bolster or challenge this thesis is to isolate one NT city, like Corinth, and reconstruct Jew/Gentile relations during the time Paul wrote his letters there. More research could also be conducted in measuring varying degrees of assimilation or "ethnic consciousness." Tetsunao Yamamori developed a tool for gauging the cultural distance between two ethnicities, but it may need to be updated.[16] Such a tool could be useful as a church tries to decide between trying to accommodate more diversity or planting a church.

An empirical analysis of multi-ethnic churches would also cut through some of the statistics that may not reflect the actual experience of diversity. The most widely accepted definition of multi-ethnic is that no ethnicity represents more than 80 percent of the congregation, but this number is based on worshippers over an entire weekend. If a church has a Hispanic service at 9:00 a.m. and an Anglo service at 10:45 a.m., it may

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[15]Partnering with an ethnically different church can take on many forms. Homogeneous churches should be interdependent on one another, having joint ministries, sharing resources and facilities, and occasionally worshipping on a Sunday under the same roof. A white church and a black church should welcome each other's pastors as guest preachers, and they can initiate joint mission trips.

[16]Tetsunao Yamamori, *Penetrating Missions' Final Frontier: A New Strategy For Unreached Peoples* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 90-91.

technically meet the definition of multi-ethnic, but it may be so in name only. A truer picture would measure multi-ethnic services and multi-ethnic relationships.

While further research could aid any project, my hope is that a sufficient theological case has been made to show that mono-ethnic churches can be pleasing to the Lord. If the reader agrees that Scripture does not require churches to be multi-ethnic, perhaps there is still an ache in his or her heart that longs for it anyway. If that groaning persists, be glad. I believe the instinct is right. In our groping for more unity we are reminded that parts of the kingdom really are "not yet." There is more to come, and the story about the multi-ethnic church has another chapter that will be written. Then, when this world gives way to the next, this unsatisfied longing will finally be resolved when all believers praise the Lamb on his throne, as unity-in-diversity covers the church as waters cover the sea.

APPENDIX 1

EXAMPLES OF THE MULTI-ETHNIC MANDATE

This appendix offers several examples of authors promoting the multi-ethnic mandate, and it will allow proponents of this theology to articulate their position in their own words. The purposes for including this section are many. I hope to demonstrate how passionate many authors are about the multi-ethnic mandate. I also hope to reveal how this mindset is adopted by a diverse group. Below the reader will find liberals and conservatives, reformed and non-reformed, academics and practitioners. The belief that churches must be multi-ethnic also transcends disciplines. While the following consists primarily of the comments of theologians and pastors, Christian sociologists are also cited.

But the greatest purpose of including these examples is to show that the multi-ethnic mandate really is a mandate. These examples will confirm that proponents of multi-ethnic churches are not simply encouraging their particular church to be multi-ethnic, or highlighting the benefits of such a church; they are linking multiethnicity to a proper understanding of Scripture and proper church health. Thus, their church model, if correct, is binding on all Christians. A few of the final examples stop short of requiring churches to be multi-ethnic, but they still urge churches to move in that direction. My previous analysis has been sufficient, so I will present their position without any critique.

DeYmaz contends, "And let me make one thing perfectly clear from the start: pursuit of the multi-ethnic local church is, in my view, not optional. It is biblically mandated for all who would aspire to lead local congregations of faith."[1]

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[1]Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and*

For Rodney Woo, "Racial integration of the church is not only mandated in Scripture, it also prepares us for the final worship service as depicted in Rev 7:9-10."[2] Elsewhere he affirms that a church's ethnic make-up needs to be defined by the ethnic make-up of the church's community: "My contention is that it is God's will that all churches move toward reaching across whatever racial and ethnic lines that have been established in their immediate community."[3] In fact, "for the homogeneous church to remain silent would invoke God's judgment."[4]

According to Woo, planting an ethnic-specific church is not a valid way to reach immigrants. Before he arrived at Wilcrest Baptist Church in Houston, the church had attempted to reach Hispanics by establishing a Hispanic church, but today he believes this approach is unfortunate and unbiblical.[5] This conviction regarding the multi-ethnic mandate leads Woo to set the following goal: "One of the challenges that I give pastors across the nation who are dealing with the multiracial issue is to become as racially diverse as your local context."[6]

Norman Geisler subtly gets at the multi-ethnic mandate by linking the local church to the universal church:

> The universal church, Christ's spiritual body, is ethnically and socially neutral. The universal church, of which the local church should be a reflection, is composed of all who belong to Jesus Christ, for in Him all are one (Gal. 3:28). There are no racial, national, or political distinctions; Christ's body transcends all of these as a spiritual union of all believers since Pentecost.[7]

Practices of a Diverse Congregation (San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 2007), xxix.

[2]R. Alan Streett, "An Interview with Rodney Woo," *Criswell Theological Review* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 78.

[3]Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 7.

[4]Ibid., 63.

[5]Ibid., 89.

[6]Streett, "An Interview with Rodney Woo," 82.

[7]Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2005), 4:54-55.

Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger argue that present day worship in the church needs to be eschatological in nature: "Eschatological worship should also be ecumenical and multicultural."[8]

The United Church of Christ in 1993 voted to adopt a statement that called upon the denomination "in all its settings to be a true multiracial and multicultural church."[9]

In his article "Great Commission Multiplication," J. D. Greear entitles one of his sections "We Must Lead Churches That Are Themselves Clear Signs of the Kingdom," where he instructs:

> Local churches should be such miracles of diversity, love, and generosity that their communities stand in awe. . . . Churches characterized by racial diversity—as well as age, cultural, and socio-economic diversity—will be a compelling display of the gospel, especially in our globalized age.[10]

In his call for multi-ethnic churches, J. Daniel Hays condemns divisions in churches that arise from sociological reasons and from forced exclusion, implying both are equally wrong:

> The New Testament demands active unity in the Church, a unity that explicitly joins differing ethnic groups together because of their common identity in Christ. . . . Christians of other races are not just equal to us; they are joined to us. We are both part of the same body, united by the presence of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us both. We are also fellow heirs, brothers and sisters of the same family. While there may be practical and sociological reasons for creating and maintaining Churches that are ethnic specific (Black Churches, Hispanic Churches, White Churches, Korean Churches, etc.) this division into ethnically based worshiping communities is contrary to the imperatives of Paul. Furthermore, the exclusion from full participation in a worshipping community of someone of another race reflects such a disobedient attitude that it can only be classified as sin. The continued maintenance of racially divided Churches in the United States points only to the fact that a large majority of Christians in that country are probably identifying

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[8]Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 90.

[9]United Methodist Church, "Multiracial and Multicultural Church," 1993, accessed June 10, 2012, http://www.ucc.org/justice/multiracial-multicultural/pronoucement.html.

[10]J. D. Greear, "Great Commission Multiplication: Church Planting and Community Ministry," in *Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: Broadman, 2010), 340-41.

themselves more with their racial background, with all its cultural baggage, than they do with Christ and the gospel.[11]

Referring to the congregational setting, Terriel R. Byrd declares that a "failure to achieve unity, community and love (between whites and African Americans) are [*sic*] contradictory to Scripture."[12] Integrated worship is clearly God's will, regardless what human traditions one may have. He continues:

> The tradition of separate churches for separate races identifies the poor spiritual and moral health of the Church. When the church fails to address this serious issue of racial segregation among the churches from all points, then it actively engages in the formation of a doctrine of separation. Unless the Church addresses the history of the tradition to its perpetuation, starting with the ground floor of the Sunday morning worship service—how that looks or doesn't look when believers gather to worship, but most important, as honest brokers of a biblical perspective that submits to what the Bible has to say about Christian unity; under these circumstances, the Church gives tacit ascent to and formulates the acceptance of the actions and values of the people within its particular community on the subject.[13]

The authors of the *Post-Racial Church* distinguish between successfully creating a multi-ethnic church and trying to create one, with the moral obligation falling on the latter: "By looking at the Bible holistically—Old and New Testaments—we present the Bible's consistent teaching on the necessity of *striving* toward inclusive worship."[14]

David Prince is concerned that the little ethnic diversity present in evangelical

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[11]J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003), 204-5. By lumping forced separation with sociological reasons for dividing, Hays has combined two very different actions. This dissertation has sought to prove there is a fundamental difference in prohibiting someone from participating in church because of his or her ethnicity (which is obviously sinful) and a church being mono-ethnic.

[12]Terriel R. Byrd, *I Shall Not Be Moved: Racial Separation in Christian Worship* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 16. The context clarifies that Byrd is envisioning a "unity, community and love" within the same church.

[13]Ibid., 19.

[14]Kenneth A. Mathews and M. Sydney Park, *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 27, italics theirs. But later the authors adopt a different tone: "We do not feel the need to press every church to be integrated, but we do strongly encourage each church to be ready to receive those of diverse ethnicity, and, where possible, to seek out peoples of different ethnic backgrounds" (ibid., 264). Here the authors articulate the position supported here. Yet elsewhere they say that multi-ethnic worship is a "non-negotiable" (ibid., 231). This sort of double-speak is common in literature supporting the multi-ethnic mandate.

churches is simply tolerated rather than celebrated:

> As we live between the times, a vital way that local churches reflect the glory of his kingdom is through being intentionally multi-ethnic outposts of the kingdom who celebrate diversity in Christ, including diversity of skin color. . . . We also need to exorcise Jim Crow's ghost that tragically still lingers in too many churches.[15]

Matt Chandler shares that planting homogeneous churches "can be done with relative ease and without dependency on the Spirit." For this reason he hopes to spend the remainder of his life helping churches become multi-ethnic, for "the gospel leads believers, as well, to be one in Christ and expects us to embrace a new culture—the 'cross culture'—whereby we, as diverse men and women, will worship and walk together as one man, one body, and one new people: the family of God (Eph. 2:19-22)."[16]

Bill Hybels has changed his opinion on the necessity of multi-ethnic churches, and *United by Faith* was instrumental in shaping his thoughts:

> Willow Creek started in the era when, as the book noted, the church growth people were saying, "Don't dissipate any of your energies fighting race issues. Focus everything on evangelism." It was the homogeneous unit principle of church growth. And I remember as a young pastor thinking, *That's true*. I didn't know whether I wanted to chance alienating people who were seekers, whose eternity was on the line, and who might only come to church one time. I wanted to take away as many obstacles as possible, other than the Cross, to help people focus on the gospel.
> So now, 30 years later, as I read this book, I recognized that a true biblical functioning community must include being multi-ethnic. My heart beats so fast for that vision today. I marvel at how naïve and pragmatic I was 30 years ago.[17]

A. Charles Ware grounds the multi-ethnic mandate partly in Christ's ministry:

> Oneness in the body of Christ is not a minor or peripheral New Testament theme. Christ both modeled and taught the concept of a multi-racial, rather than homogeneous, church. In harmony with His model *and in obedience to His*

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[15]David Prince, "Jesus is Not Colorblind: Celebrating Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Local Church," February 10, 2014, accessed July 9, 2014, http://erlc.com/article/jesus-is-not-colorblind-celebrating-racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-the-loca.

[16]Matt Chandler, foreword to *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them* by Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 12.

[17]Bill Hybels, quoted in Edward Gilbreath and Mark Galli, "Harder than Anyone Can Imagine: Four Working Pastors—Latino, Asian, Black and White—Respond to the Bracing Thesis of *United by Faith.* A CT forum with Noel Castellanos, Bill Hybels, Soong-Chan Rah, Frank Reid," *Christianity Today*, April 2005, accessed May 6, 2011, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/april/23.36.html.

command, His disciples built a racially diverse church.[18]

Mbandi summarizes the thesis of his dissertation: "we have attempted to argue that the unity of God's peoples must transcend ethnic boundaries. God expected the unity of the Christians in the early church to transcend the existing enmity between Jews and Gentiles."[19]

Acts 29 church planter Leonce Crump sees the promotion of mono-ethnic churches as moral crisis:

> There were years where I feared saying what I'm about to say next—but given everything we see scripturally, I think your heart would almost have to be sinfully disengaged from what the Bible has to say to continue to promote homogeny among God's people. There's sin in that. There's sin in that. And I think some of us need to start with repentance before we start trying to change around our worship services.[20]

One church that is hoping to become multi-ethnic is Immanuel Baptist Church in Louisville. This excerpt from the church's website reveals it believes all churches should embrace its multi-ethnic vision:

> As Immanuel, we are seeking to build a place where a multitude of extremely different kinds of people live in community together as equals. We are seeking to build a community from all cultures where Christ is King! We long to see this church (and every church) be a place where people from the wrong side of the tracks, and the so-called right side of the tracks grow together into one united community. We long to be a place where African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, and whites, rich and poor, successful and struggling, educated and uneducated all find a home and a community![21]

Stevens clarifies that his vision for ethnically diverse churches is a biblical truth: "My goal is *to define the scriptural truth of the church as the New Humanity and*

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[18]A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God: How Revelation and Redemption Lead to Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 26, italics added.

[19]Paul Muindi Mbandi, "Toward a Theological Understanding of the Unity of the Church in Relation to Ethnic Diversity" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004), 262n10.

[20]Leonce Crump, "Beyond Diversity: The Transcultural Narrative of the Scripture," Speech presented at Mosaix Global Conference, November 6, 2013, accessed February 23, 2013, http://www.mosaix2013.com/Tracks/track01#.U2Bg1yDD_IU.

[21]Immanuel Baptist Church, "Our Vision: Building a Community from All Cultures Where Christ is King," accessed July 9, 2014, http://www.ibclouisville.org/welcome/our-vision/.

its relevance to the contemporary challenges and opportunities of nurturing

multiethnicity in and among local churches."[22] He goes on, "I will argue that we must

intentionally shift our focus from *natural* groupings in the church to *supernatural*

groupings in the church, finding our point of commonality—not in such determinants as

color, culture, or class-but in our shared identity as members of God's New Humanity."[23]

When Christians follow their natural preferences and the result is a mono-ethnic church,

this reality "grieves the heart of God" and it should lead the church to repent.[24]

Writing the foreword to one of Stevens' works, Metzger writes:

> Dr. David Stevens has provided an invaluable resource to the church in responding to the New Testament mandate for ecclesial existence: *We are to experience and model our New Humanity in Christ rather than revert to our old ways bound up with various forms of societal separation. In God's New Humanity—the church—there are no ethnic, economic, and related divisions. So, be one as God is one.*[25]

Danny Akin emphasizes the biblical nature of multi-ethnic churches as he

offers twelve axioms for "Great Commission Resurgence":

> Yes, we must go around the world to reach Asians and Europeans, the Africans and the South Americans. But we must also go across the street, down the road and into every corner of our local mission field where God, in grace, has brought the nations to us.
> This means planting authentically Bible/Baptist churches and filling them with authentic followers of Jesus, irrespective of nationality, race, economic or social status. Genuine discipleship is not negotiable.[26]

While many of the multi-ethnic church movement will make allowances for

churches to divide along language lines, many others do not. Mathews and Park insist,

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[22]David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 7.

[23]Ibid., 33-34.

[24]Ibid., 230. Stevens uses "segregation" in a passive sense here. If black people prefer to worship with black people and the net result is a black church, this is, according to his usage, segregation (ibid., 232).

[25]Paul Louis Metzger, foreword to Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, ix, italics his.

[26]Jason Hall, "Seminary Head Calls for Great Commission Resurgence, Streamlining Denomination," *Baptist Press*, April 16, 2009, accessed July 9, 2014, http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=30282&ref=BPNews-RSSFeed0416.

"Worship must overcome the barriers of language, tradition, and the prejudice which we have wrongly held to."[27] Writing for UnityinChristMagazine.com, Pete C. Menjares agrees: "The overwhelming testimony of scripture is that the church is to be a multi-cultural, multi-national and multilingual gathering of believers."[28] Stevens also lists language among the barriers that are overcome by the Holy Spirit: "It quickly becomes apparent that any unity or sense of community founded upon *natural* factors such as ethnicity, culture, language, or socioeconomic conditions rather than the *supernatural* ingredient of God's indwelling Spirit falls short of true biblical community."[29]

While the multi-ethnic mandate believes all churches have to be multi-ethnic, other authors state their desire for multi-ethnic churches more modestly. This position may be called the *multi-ethnic preference*, which urges churches to be multi-ethnic, but it stops short of saying that Scripture commands all churches to be this way. The authors of *United by Faith* advocate for this position: "when possible, congregations should strive to be multiracial."[30]

Branson and Martínez use similar language: "We believe that whenever possible churches should pursue cultural boundary crossing with neighbors and

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[27]Kenneth A. Mathews and M. Sydney Park, *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 143.

[28]Pete C. Menjares, "Is There a Biblical Basis for Encouraging Diversity?" *Unity in Christ Magazine*, April 26, 2010, accessed July 9, 2014, http://unityinchristmagazine.com/theology/is-there-a-biblical-basis-for-encouraging-diversity/

[29]Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, 129. If different peoples near an existing church do not share a language, Stevens admits this difference makes it "difficult to worship together" (ibid., 236). He then goes on to highlight how his own church has translated his English sermon into two other languages from the stage, and other churches could utilize headsets to do simultaneous translation.

[30]Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 12. A *Christianity Today* article provided excerpts from *United by Faith*, and the title of this piece suggests that those whose language reflects the multi-ethnic preference still have a strong interest in churches moving in a multi-ethnic direction ("All Churches Should Be Multiracial: The Biblical Case," *Christianity Today,* April 2005, 32-35).

intercultural life within their congregations."[31] But this preference is strong. They admit,

"We share an agenda with those who want churches to be models and agents of racial

reconciliation and authentic diversity."[32]

While John Piper does not insist all churches have be multi-ethnic, the degree

to which he praises multi-ethnic churches implies all churches should try to be: "But

there are solid biblical, historical, and cultural reasons why ethnically diverse Christians

living, working, worshipping, relaxing, and eating together is a Christ-exalting beautiful

thing—and therefore worth pursuing."[33]

Russell Moore calls Christians to pray for multi-ethnic churches:

> Let's pray that our churches increasingly become the sorts of places that testify to
> the kingdom God, a kingdom of God that isn't united around the color of our skin;
> the kingdom of God that is united around the red blood of Jesus Christ that tears
> down the dividing walls and makes us one in Christ.[34]

Yancey provides one of the most qualified articulations of the multi-ethnic

preference: "I do not believe that God intends most of the churches in a multiracial

society to be mono-racial."[35] But he acknowledges the permissibility of mono-ethnic

churches: "Despite biblical support for the importance of a multiracial church, I am not

arguing that a monoracial church is a sin, in and of itself."[36]

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[31]Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities.* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 89.

[32]Ibid., 92.

[33]John Piper, *Bloodlines*: *Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 169. In this same context Piper acknowledges, "There may be situations where living with all one ethnic group is inevitable. If so, I don't condemn it" (ibid). He does not expound on what situations are inevitable, but he seems to be envisioning an ethnically homogeneous community, not a multi-ethnic environment where a particular group worships independently.

[34]Russell Moore, "Racial Reconciliation: 'I Am a Man'" (online video) posted January 31, 2014, accessed February 10, 2014, http://erlc.com/erlc/video/.

[35]George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 47-48.

[36]Ibid., 50.

APPENDIX 2

A CITY-WIDE CONCEPT OF CHURCH UNITY

A weakness in the theology that supports the multi-ethnic mandate is that it often has an overly-simplified reconstruction of the first-century church. For example, when DeYmaz argues how the mystery of Christ calls for multi-ethnic churches, he argues that Paul's audience is the (singular) local church in Ephesus.[1] But a closer look at the context in Ephesus, Rome and Jerusalem will reveal that there was no single church in these cities, at least according to the modern understanding of the term. Instead, these churches often gathered in smaller groups yet retained a larger sense of being a part of a city-wide church.

A reconstruction of the situation in Ephesus reveals Paul wrote Ephesians not to an individual congregation but to an association of local churches in and around Ephesus. The population in Ephesus in the first century broached a quarter million, and Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years. During this time "the residents of Asia (Ephesus) heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). Although Luke does not list the total number of converts,[2] the gospel advanced enough in Ephesus to disrupt the economy as it related to the selling of silver shrines to Artemis (20:23-38). Based on the size of the city and the apparent success of the gospel, Arnold holds that it is unlikely that Paul is writing to an individual congregation.[3] O'Brien agrees, "We need

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[1]Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 2007), 30.

[2] Luke does count "about twelve men" who believe in Jesus from what appears to be Paul's first ministry encounter in Ephesus (Acts 20:1-7).

[3]Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 45.

not suppose (since the text does not demand it) that all the Christians in the city were 'jammed' into one megachurch!"[4]

Moreover, there is some internal evidence in Ephesians that suggests that Paul's epistle was meant to circulate among a group of churches in the city and perhaps around the outlying area. The clause "in Ephesus" in 1:1 is disputed. Some of the earliest manuscripts lack "in Ephesus," which has led some scholars to conclude that the church at Ephesus is merely one of several recipients of this letter.[5] In addition, Ephesians lacks any personal greetings from Paul, which is surprising considering that he served there for three years. This fact suggests Paul does not know all of his readers personally. This possibility becomes more likely in light of 3:2 when the apostle is not positive that his readers have heard about him—an unlikely comment if his letter were addressed to the exact same group of people he led during his time in Ephesus.[6]

This analysis is relevant to the present topic because it indicates that the church in Ephesus was probably a conglomeration of smaller churches. Yet Paul, when writing to all the believers in Ephesus, can call them "one new man" (2:15) and "one body" (4:4). Moreover, Christ addresses his letter to the singular "church in Ephesus" (Rev 2:1), and in Acts 20:17 Paul summoned "the elders of *the* church" to share his departing words. Hence, there were many churches in Ephesus *and* one church in Ephesus. They probably considered themselves "one" because everyone could trace their spiritual lineage back to the days when the gospel first came to the city. They were one because doctrinal division

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[4]Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 48.

[5]See Arnold for a helpful discussion of this textual variant. He is probably right in his conclusion that "in Ephesus" is original (Arnold, *Ephesians*, 23-29).

[6]O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 48. The absence of personal greetings in Ephesians does not necessarily create distance between Paul and his readers. Arnold recognizes that 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Philippians do not contain personal greetings either. See also Eph 1:15, where Paul reports that he has "heard" of their faith. This could either refer to hearing about the spiritual progress of the same people to whom he ministered, or it could be another indication that Paul had not met those reading his letter (ibid., 49).

had not yet splintered the church. They were one in that each congregation in Ephesus was still under the authority of Paul. And they were one in that the entire group of Christians, although too numerous to meet together for regular fellowship or worship, was not so big that it could not come together if the need required—like the distribution of an apostolic letter. Altogether it seems that the believers could be "one" without necessarily gathering together on a regular basis. They had a city-wide concept of Christian unity.

The church(es) in Rome reveals a similar two-tiered ecclesiology. Paul ends his epistle to the Romans by greeting those in Prisca and Aquila's house (16:3-5). Presumably an entire church met at their home, but Paul also greets many other people who did not seem to meet in their home. Paul also mentions all those who belong to the "family of Aristobulus" (16:10) and "Narcissus" (16:11). This suggests that there were many local congregations in Rome.[7] Interestingly, Paul does not address his letter to "the church at Rome" but "To all those in Rome," (1:7) further suggesting the presence of multiple congregations in the city. Yet despite this diversity, Paul can still say to the Romans collectively, "so we, though many, are *one body* in Christ, and individually members one of another" (12:5). Elsewhere the apostle calls his readers in various house churches to glorify God with "one voice" (15:6). These verses again suggest that believers can be "one" without having to be one congregation.

The church in Jerusalem also may have consisted of smaller house churches, yet these groups of believers still formed one church in Jerusalem. Luke records that "the church" was praying for Peter while in prison (Acts 12:5). Then upon his release he went to meet with those who were praying, and they were all located in Mary's house (12:12). Thus, "the church" met in a home. But surely only a fraction of the thousands of believers in Jerusalem were present for this prayer gathering. Once Peter greets the

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[7]Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 130-31.

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saints, he moves on to another place, leaving the church instructions to inform James of his release. James was a key leader in the church at Jerusalem, and his absence at the church prayer meeting suggests that this meeting was not a city-wide gathering of the church. Instead it was probably one of several house church gatherings. But this does not mean that there were multiple churches in the city. Peterson does not think all the believers gathered in Jerusalem as one congregation.

> 'The church in Jerusalem' in 8:1 means the community of believers in that city subjected to persecution (cf. 8:3). This expression is equivalent to 'the whole church' in 5:11. In both cases, it is unlikely that the reference is to a congregation actually gathered for corporate worship and edification, since we know that the Jerusalem Christians met in various house groups. Having grown in numbers to exceed 5,000 'men' (4:4)—possibly with women and children in addition to that—it would have been difficult for all the believers to have continued meeting in the temple courts together.[8]

Despite the fact that the large number of Christians in Jerusalem would have prevented them from all meeting together in the same place, there is still only "the church in Jerusalem" (8:1; 11:22).

Hence, Jerusalem seems to have many churches that were bound together by a common sense of unity that spread across the whole city. As in Ephesus, the feeling of unity that allows them still to be called "one church" may have derived from their common history—they could all probably trace their spiritual lineage back to Pentecost. They also shared leadership—the apostles then the elders.[9]

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[8]David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 94.

[9]The church in Corinth also seems to have a two-tiered structure. Paul writes to "the church of God that is in Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2), yet in his discussion on the abuses of the Lord's Supper, Paul refers to "when you come together as a church" (11:18). This phrase suggests there were also subgroupings of the church in Corinth (Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Settings*, rev. ed. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009], 32). If this is the case, the "church" in Corinth met in both large and small settings. But what makes the setting in Corinth different from Ephesus, Rome, and Jerusalem is that the church in Corinth seems to have maintained a pattern of regular meetings, although Banks does not think these were necessarily weekly meetings (ibid., 34). The analysis I am providing here deviates from Banks' conclusion that ἐκκλησία can refer only to actual gatherings (ibid., 26-46). For a helpful discussion on the context of Corinthian house gatherings, see Bruce Button and Fika J Van Rensburg, "The 'House Churches' in Corinth," *Journal of the New Testament Society of South Africa* 37, no. 1 (2003): 1-28.

This survey of the churches in Ephesus, Rome and Jerusalem is intended to reveal two realities that initially appear to be in conflict. First, there was one church in each city. Scripture identifies all the believers in these cities as a singular "church" (Acts 11:22; 12:5-12; 20:17; Rev 2:1), "one body" (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:4) or "one voice" (Rom 15:6). Second, there were multiple church gatherings in each city that met in homes. It is unlikely that all the believers in these cities met together on a weekly basis because the average house church could fit only about thirty people.[10] This set a natural cap on the size of a gathering. And it is nearly certain that these cities had more than thirty believers each, which means that the church was spread out into multiple homes.[11]

Altogether, this analysis suggests that first-century Christians, at least in the cities under consideration above, likely had a two-tiered ecclesiology. An individual Christian would have been a part of the church that met in Bob's home, and he would have been a part of the church in Ephesus. There was a city-wide notion of church unity, and Paul seemingly uses ἐκκλησία to refer to these individual house churches and a collection of house churches.[12] How does this reconstruction of the NT house/city church relate to the multi-ethnic mandate?

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[10]Ibid., 35. Blach believes that scholars have concluded that Paul's house churches were smaller than they really were. He holds that many could have accommodated more than forty participants (David L. Balch, "Rich Pompelian Houses, Shops for Rent, and the Huge Apartment Building in Herculaneum as Typical Spaces for Pauline House Churches," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 1 [2004]: 41-42).

[11]It is possible that some could object to this reconstruction and try to argue that all the believers in these areas did regularly meet together as one congregation. Paul does recount that he taught the Ephesians "in public and from house to house" (Acts 20:20). Luke also reports that the early church in Jerusalem met in the temple and in homes (2:46). But these references do not suggest that all believers came together in one place for a worship service. Paul may be referring to his public teaching in Ephesus in the Hall of Tyrannus (19:9), which seems to be a combination of evangelism and discipling new believers. The reference to the church gathering in the temple in Jerusalem simply locates the temple as the center of the communal living that marked the early church. It does not necessarily mean all Christians gathered in the temple at one time. While Christians in other cities (i.e. Corinth) may have all come together, neither of these references demonstrates that all the believers in these areas came together to form one congregation that met each week.

[12]P. H. Towner, "Households and House Codes," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 417.

It confirms that biblical unity can exist within a congregation *and* between congregations. The NT picture of the church is not monolithic. It is nuanced and diverse, and the boundaries from one house church to another house church and to the city-wide church seem fluid. If believers can be united with one another through their union with Christ *without being a part of the same congregation*, then this option allows churches in the same city to be ethnically similar while preserving the Scriptural call for Christian unity. A Hispanic church and Korean church in the same town can both constitute "one church" and satisfy the NT's call to Christian unity. Those who promote the multi-ethnic mandate, therefore, misstep when they read passages about Christian unity or oneness and conclude that such oneness has to be expressed by everyone worshipping in the same room every Sunday morning. Two separate mono-ethnic congregations could also be part of one body, even if they retain separate worship experiences.

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ABSTRACT

A THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE
MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH
MOVEMENT: 2000 - 2013

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This dissertation attempts to answer the following question: Does Scripture call all churches to be as ethnically diverse as their communities? Chapter 1 introduces the "multi-ethnic mandate," the belief the Scripture instructs all churches to be ethnically diverse. Chapter 2 isolates seven arguments in favor of the multi-ethnic mandate: the Babel/Pentecost argument, the hospitality/love argument, the argument based on Christ's ministry, the unity argument, the Jew/Gentile argument, the heaven argument, and the argument based on NT examples. Chapter 3 argues that these seven reasons do not provide compelling proof for the multi-ethnic mandate. Chapter 4 highlights four biblical values that mono-ethnic churches support: God cares about preserving culture, Christians retain their ethnic identities, contextualization can make ministry more effective, and God uses the natural connectedness of people to expand his kingdom. Chapter 5 summarizes the thesis, warns of some potential dangers of affirming the multi-ethnic mandate, and points to possible areas of further research. The over-arching point of the dissertation is to demonstrate that churches need to reach out to all ethnicities to the best of their abilities, but if the natural byproduct of such ministry is a mono-ethnic church, then such a church is not unbiblical or unhealthy.

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