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Homogeneity and Hybridity:
Does McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle Fit the Realities of a Multiethnic World?

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From the Guest Editor

The Ralph D. Winter Lectureship 2022: Revisiting the HUP

This special, double issue of the Journal explores the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP), one of the most controversial of Donald McGavran's missiological principles. This principle, which first emerged in *The Bridges of God* (1955) and then was unpacked more fully in *Understanding Church Growth* (1970), was the major focus of the spring 2022 Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship, "Homogeneity and Hybridity: Revisiting HUP." The articles that make up this issue are based on the presentations of a number of diverse practitioner-scholars who added valuable reflections on this topic.

McGavran first defined Homogeneous Units (HU) using descriptive terminology to draw attention to the ways that people in all societies across the world naturally group together around some common traits, or beliefs, or lifestyles that then give them identity and purpose. This bonding to a common set of characteristics—be it ethnicity, language, musical preference, level of education, socioeconomic bracket, or simply a way of thinking—serves as a kind of social glue that holds people together in a kind of belonging that gives meaning.

But McGavran went beyond using HU as a way of *describing* how cultures and societies adhere, to *prescribing* it as the way missionaries could reach more people with the gospel. Stating the evangelistic principle simply, the HUP recognized that *people are more likely to come to Christ without crossing cultural, linguistic, or ethnic barriers.* Respect the natural social glue and people are more receptive to the gospel. For McGavran, this principle was based on how societies work and therefore it was strategic for missionary practice. However, some didn't agree with McGavran's focus on homogeneity and a controversy emerged that has shadowed this teaching throughout the last seventy years.

To understand the *history and development* of the HUP we begin with three scholars who contribute to the origin story. **Gary McIntosh,** author of the most recent and comprehensive biography of Donald McGavran, describes how McGavran explained the HUP, how he was misunderstood, and how McGavran perceived the reality he tried to communicate. **Greg Parson's** article further outlines the HUP debate that began to unfold at Lausanne's special 1977 Consultation on the subject. His historical study is based on written records and archived audio recordings that identify the way these proponents and opponents wrestled with the concepts and applications of the HUP. Interesting first-hand observations from both homogeneous and heterogeneous ministries are offered by **R. W. Lewis,** whose father, Ralph Winter, was one of the 1977 Consultation presenters. Recounting rich, personal missions experience earned by living and serving in five continents over a 40-year period, Lewis offers unique perspectives on how the HUP operated in diverse tribal and also urban contexts.

The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal's editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology, or the society's executive committee.

Other *passions and perspectives* generated further complexity to this topic. **Ruth Padilla DeBorst,** another child of a prominent contributor to the 1974 and 1977 Lausanne gatherings, described how her father, Rene Padilla, warned with deep conviction that the HUP was captive to an American culture driven by technology and racism. She implores the church to move beyond their homogeneities and embrace cultural differences in expressing unity under the Lordship of Christ. Adding to our understanding of how the HUP functions in people movements in Ethiopia, **Marcos Zemede,** a medical doctor, describes both the benefits and the dangers. The HUP is a key that unlocks the door for the movements of the gospel, but the same key can lock the door behind them—good advice to remember. Despite the fact that **George Hunter III** slips in a joke at my expense, his article brings a clarity to the HUP conversation by distinguishing the denotations and connotations of key terms. He suggests some fresh synonyms that avoid some of the negative associations assigned to the HUP.

Moving on to *applications and implications,* three more articles demonstrate the utility of the HUP in understanding multiethnic contexts. **Chris Clayman** offers a compelling and nuanced study of how urbanized migrants may carry various identities within multiple homogeneous units (often centered on culture-of-origin) as they interface with the heterogeneity of New York City. In doing so, he reveals the emergent opportunities for reaching the nations in the tumbling cacophony of HU's in any city. **Warrick Farah** wrestles with the application of the HUP to church planting movements (CPM) and suggests we consider the HUP to be less of a principle and more of a paradox. He alerts us to the attendant dangers of it being either uncritically endorsed or dogmatically and categorically criticized. His point has been made in other articles, but Warrick captures the creative tension inherent in this examination.

My own article (**Alan McMahan**) suggests that, in reality, effective ministries make use of both homogeneous units (groups) as well as heterogeneous units (multiethnic or diverse populations) for different purposes when connecting with different kinds of peoples. It comes down to what we are focusing on, and how that affects our contextualization. If we zoom-in, we focus more narrowly and work to communicate the gospel in forms that effectively connect to a language or affinity group. Those communication forms are more culture specific and locally relevant. If we zoom-out, we focus more widely and include more diversity in how we communicate. Both HU groups and heterogeneous groups are vital. The different foci need each other to be able to reach all peoples.

The debate on the HUP will probably not be resolved with the publishing of this issue of the *IJFM*. It will likely be discussed for many years to come. Our hope is that the articles found in this issue will widen our appreciation for the complexity of the HUP, and that it will help us think more critically about our efforts to make the gospel available to all people. May we all approach this conversation with a greater sense of humility and mutual respect as we engage the harvest.

In Him,

Alan McMahan, Guest Editor

The *IJFM* is pleased to welcome Alan McMahan as our Guest Editor, a man who has wrestled with the issues surrounding cultural homogeneity and hybridity as a field worker in Indonesia, a professor of missiology at Biola University, and as an editor of the *Great Commission Journal.* The *IJFM* is grateful for his investment in this issue of the journal.

Brad Gill, Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Unpacking the Historical Development of the Homogeneous Unit Principle

by Gary L. McIntosh

Gary L. McIntosh, DMin, PhD, is an internationally known speaker, author, and distinguished affiliate professor of Christian Ministry & Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. His book Donald A McGavran: A Biography of the Twentieth Century's Premiere Missiologist *is the first full overview of McGavran's life and ministry.*

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from a lecture given at the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship, March 3–5, 2022.

My first encounter with Donald McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) came unexpectedly during my first pastorate in Oregon. After graduating from seminary, I accepted the call of a local Baptist congregation to become their pastor. Like many new seminary graduates, I was happy to find a church where I could begin to put my years of study into practice. Little did I know how much I still had to learn, particularly about the HUP.

My church was located on the west side of a major freeway, and I assumed the church would experience steady growth due to its attractive location. Yet, after engaging the ministry with enthusiasm for a while, I realized things were not moving along as I desired. My efforts at preaching, teaching, caregiving, visitation, evangelism, and outreach were not bringing the expected results. Guests came. None stayed. Efforts at evangelism bore no fruit. Innovative attempts at ministry failed. The most frustrating aspect, however, was the growth of another church located on the east side of the freeway. From my perspective at the time, our churches were similar in theology, and offered the same basic programs. I could not understand why the one church was growing and mine was not.

My growing frustration led me to further research, and I started reading some of the early church growth literature, which opened my eyes to insights not commonly taught in seminaries at that time. For example, I discovered that my church had a German heritage, while the growing church had a Norwegian heritage. The people in my church were representative of a lower socio-economic group, while those in the other church were socioeconomically middle class. My church was blue-collar and the other church was white-collar. My church had a long history of hurtful experiences that created a congregation with low self-esteem, a sense of failure, and feelings of shame. In contrast the other church had a long history of fruitfulness, which created a congregation with high self-esteem, a sense of success, and feelings of pride.

My investigation, of course, revealed that my church on the west side of the freeway was of an entirely different homogeneous unit than the growing church on the east side of the freeway. As I came to understand the dynamics of the HUP in my own situation, my ministry eyes (what we used to call *church growth eyes*) were opened to understand why the one church was growing and mine was not growing. Understanding the HUP helped me understand how I might more effectively engage in ministry.

Thus, you should know that I write with a positive view of the HUP. As I begin, you should also know that I come to this topic from a North American perspective. My career has focused on pastoring, church consulting, and training local church pastors for service in the US. While I have traveled and taught in several countries, my primary ministry has focused on the church in the US. As such, my understanding and discussion of the HUP focuses on the questions and concerns found within North America.

McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle: Setting the Stage for Further Discussion

McGavran developed several principles of effective evangelism during his thirty-one years (1923–1954) as a missionary in central India. His insights were refined through another six years (1955–1961) as a peripatetic missionary researching the growth of the church worldwide. Then, in 1961, after founding the Institute of Church Growth (ICG) in Eugene, OR, his thoughts on the growth of the church were further distilled through extended conversations with field missionaries and teaching colleagues at both the ICG (1961–1965) and the Fuller School of World Mission (SWM, founded September 1965).[1]

McGavran's thoughts on effective evangelism appeared in bits and pieces in various articles published throughout his time in India. However, with the publication of *The Bridges of God* in 1955, he started sharing his ideas with a wide audience. This book was the "most read missionary book in 1956," and propelled McGavran into the center of the developing thought about evangelistic missions following World War II.[2] Over the years, his ideas on effective evangelism became known as Church Growth Thought, and his mature thinking appeared in *Understanding Church Growth* (1970).[3]

McGavran is well known for promoting several evangelistic principles (e.g., principles of receptivity, people groups, homogeneity, removing fog through research, setting bold goals, understanding social structure, etc.). Most of the criticism

of Church Growth Thought, however, centered on his Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP). Those who expressed criticism of the HUP in the early years included missionaries, pastors, professors, and theologians such as John Yoder, Orlando Costas, Victor Hayward, Harvie Conn, René Padilla, Francis Cubose, Lesslie Newbigin, and Martin Marty.[4]

Their concerns resulted in a consultation on the Homogeneous Unit Principle held on the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, which was sponsored by the Lausanne Theology and Education Group, between May 31, 1977 and June 2, 1977. A summary report of that gathering was published in 1978 as the Lausanne Occasional Paper 1.[5]

Since that time, criticisms and misunderstanding have continued to be expressed from time to time by new leaders including Mark DeYmaz and Soong-Chan Rah.[6] So, now, nearly a half-century after that original consultation, we gather to discuss the HUP again. My role at this conference is to set the stage for further discussion. To do so, this presentation is divided into five questions: How did the HUP develop in McGavran's mind? What did McGavran say? What did McGavran mean? Why was the HUP misunderstood? And what is the reality?

How Did the HUP Develop in McGavran's Mind? The HUP's Mass Movements Roots

McGavran's awareness of the HUP began in 1933 and continued to mature for the next fifty years. His introduction to the importance of homogeneity for evangelism started when he read *Christian Mass Movements in India*.[7] Reflecting back on this time period, McGavran recalled:

> As I read Waskom Pickett's *Christian Mass Movements in India*, my eyes were opened. I suddenly saw that where people become Christians one by one and are seen as outcasts by their own people, as traitors who have joined another community, the church grows very, very slowly. The one by one "out of my ancestral community into a new low community" was a sure recipe for slow growth. Conversely, where men and women could become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ while remaining in their own segment of society, there the gospel was sometimes accepted with great pleasure by great numbers.[8]

The studies Pickett had conducted demonstrated conclusively that winning people to Christ one by one was an ineffective

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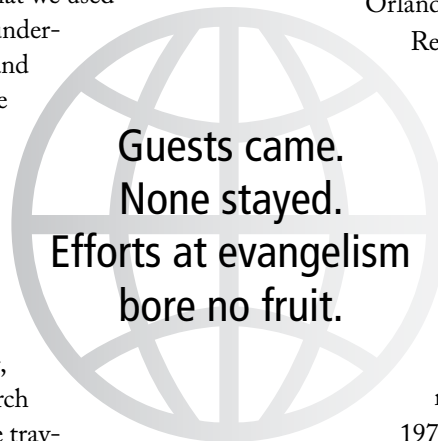
manner to proceed. Since all societies are made up more or less of homogeneous units,

> It is only when a series of individual decisions generate enough heat to lead a whole group to act as a unit and when enough group decisions have been taken to set the caste or tribe alight that the church really grows.[9]

McGavran's personal experience among the Satnamis of central India, and his further research, confirmed his belief that evangelism that resulted in strong local churches, happened best within homogeneous units comprised of families, clans, and tribes, and could only be accomplished by focusing on receptive homogeneous units of the vast human mosaic. He explained the roots of the HUP to David Wasdale of St. Matthia Vicarage in London, England,

> The homogeneous unit principle has been formulated first overseas in tightly structured tribal or caste populations, where there is no "non-tribal" or "non-caste" society. In such populations either the Church does multiply congregations within each HU [homogeneous unit], or does not multiply congregations at all.[10]

He further summed up his understanding in a letter to Donald Hoke, treasurer of the Lausanne committee:

> God wants His lost children found; the complexities of the situation must not divert churches and Christians from mission; the world was never more winnable than it is today; the mosaic of mankind has in it at present thousands of responsive homogeneous units; the social sciences can be and must be harnessed to the propagation of the Gospel; the theological and biblical defenses cast up by beleaguered missionaries facing hostile populations are not needed by ministers and missionaries facing responsive multitudes, and it is normal and healthy for churches to grow. Slow growth is often a disease, fortunately usually curable.[11]

What Did McGavran Say? An Elastic Concept

McGavran explained the homogeneous unit as "simply a section of society in which all the members have some characteristic in common."[12] This definition of the homogeneous unit (HU) is very broad, and makes no direct reference to race or ethnicity, although it can be applied to each one in certain contexts. According to McGavran's understanding, a HU is present whenever members of society gather in groups where clear characteristics are observable, and where the characteristics form a sort of glue that binds the group together. In fact, as is often missed, the common characteristic of a HU may be a worldview, perspective, or attitude. Thus, the glue that binds people together might be a particular political perspective, or a theological viewpoint, or a passionate commitment. For instance, it is common to list churches as evangelistic churches or teaching churches or social action churches. Classifying churches in this manner uses the common passion that binds the people together (i.e., evangelism, teaching, or social action) as a description of their HU. Thus, when churches are formed around a common passion of demonstrating

the oneness of people from different ethnic groups, economic groups, or social strata, they are still homogeneous. Churches that are multiethnic are homogeneous! Multi-ethnicity becomes their homogeneity. McGavran understood "the homogeneous unit is an elastic concept, its meaning depending on the context in which it is used." "It might be a political unit or sub unit," "a section of society in which all the members have some characteristic in common," a language, a family or clan, or a host of other units defined by geography, lineage, dialect, or a number of other characteristics.[13] With this basic understanding of a HU in place, McGavran articulated the HUP: "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers."[14]

> # Many missionaries in that era carried with them a gospel of salvation that included the unbiblical requirement that converts change their ethnic, community, or family allegiance.

What Did McGavran Mean? Can People Follow Christ without Traitorously Leaving Their Kindred?

McGavran clarified and defended the HUP repeatedly. When he introduced the HUP, he was answering the question of whether a person can become a Christian without changing his or her family of origin, ethnic identity, or clan. He had faced this challenge directly while a missionary in India for thirty-one years. For most of the history of missions in India, missionaries had essentially asked that people accept Christ *and* become British or American or Danish, etc. Unknown to many missionaries in that era, they carried with them a gospel of salvation that included the unbiblical requirement that converts change their ethnic or community or family allegiance. This led to converts coming slowly to Christ, since most people saw Christianity as a Western religion that required them to abandon their own social network.

It is the same issue that confronted the disciples in Acts 15. There the question was "Can a Gentile become a Christian without having to become a Jew?" As the church spread among the Gentiles (Acts 11: 20) the "Word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied" (Acts 12:24). Paul and Barnabas were sent forth on their first missionary journey and ended up turning primarily to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:46). After they returned to Antioch, they reported, "all things that God had

done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). Almost immediately, some began to preach and teach that the Gentiles had to abandon their own culture (or homogeneous unit) and become Jews (a different homogeneous unit). The question raised so much concern that it was decided to go to Jerusalem to discuss the issue with the apostles and elders there. After arriving and entering into a debate, it was finally decided, "we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:19). In other words, it was determined that Gentiles could remain Gentiles (i.e., remain in their own HU) and did not need to become Jews in order to be saved.

As McGavran later wrote,

> It may be taken as axiomatic that whenever becoming a Christian is considered a racial rather than a religious decision, there the growth of the Church will be exceedingly slow.[15]

So today, we might ask, can a Nigerian become a Christian and still be Nigerian? Or can a Korean become a Christian and still be Korean? Or can an Egyptian become a Christian and still remain an Egyptian? McGavran put it this way,

> As the Church faces the evangelization of the world, perhaps her main problem is how to present Christ so that men can truly follow Him without traitorously leaving their kindred.[16]

McGavran explained what he meant by using the HUP in a letter to historian Martin Marty:

> The HU principle arose facing the three billion who have yet to believe. Tremendous numbers of people are not becoming Christian because of unnecessary barriers (of language, culture, wealth, education, sophistication, imperialistic stance) erected by the advocates. . . . Do, I beg of you, think of it primarily as a missionary and an evangelistic principle.[17]

Why Was McGavran Misunderstood? A Perplexing Hostility

Like many of you, I have wondered why McGavran's HUP was so misunderstood. When one reads McGavran's articles and books, it is obvious that he was solely interested in how more and more people might be brought to salvation in Jesus Christ. Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that the HUP was misunderstood for several reasons.

First, it is my observation that some people reacted to popular rumor without engaging in proper research. In every field of endeavor, there are good critics and bad critics. Good critics investigate questions thoroughly before reaching a conclusion, while bad critics react to what they hear without doing the necessary study to reach an informed decision. This likely occurred with the HUP, as pastors, professors, and other church leaders responded to ongoing hearsay.

Second, it is my observation that some people saw the HUP as a principle of exclusion (i.e., how to keep people out of the church), rather than a principle of inclusion (i.e., how to get more people into the church). McGavran's concern was always on how to get more people to believe in Christ and become responsible members of his church. He desired to remove barriers to belief so that people were free to accept or reject Christ without unnecessary hurdles. As I mentioned earlier in this article, he wrote to Martin Marty, "Do, I beg of you, think of it [HUP] primarily as a missionary and an evangelistic principle."[18]

Some people saw the HUP as a principle of exclusion rather than a principle of inclusion.

Third, it is my observation that some people thought of the HUP as a principle of discipleship rather than a principle of evangelism. McGavran believed that once a person received Christ as Lord and Savior, their subsequent spiritual growth would lead them to brotherhood and social justice. To him, the HUP offered insights on how to win people to Christ through evangelism, but it was not a principle to be used in the ongoing process of spiritual growth. The chief reason McGavran promoted the HUP was "to keep the door to salvation open to those very large blocks of humanity from which currently very, very few are becoming Christian."[19]

Fourth, it is my observation that some believed the HUP was prescriptive rather than descriptive. As McGavran studied the growth and decline of churches worldwide, he described what he saw taking place. While he felt the HUP offered much insight into why people refused to believe in Christ, he stopped short of prescribing it as a principle to be used in planting churches.

Fifth, it is my observation that some people understood the HUP as just a form of niche marketing, particularly marketing to middle class, white churches. While there may be some aspects of the HUP that fit into a marketing paradigm, McGavran never conceived of marketing the church as a strategy. Nor did he see the HUP as applying only to white, middle-class churches.

Sixth, it is my observation that some people who dislike the HUP have never taken the time to read McGavran's books or articles, or, if they have read him, they misquote or misunderstand him. As I have discussed the HUP with numerous critics, I have asked, "Have you read McGavran?" Sadly, I have found that, for many, McGavran is a forgotten man. In my experience, about ninety-five percent (I am being generous) have not read any of McGavran's works. Their negative reactions are more tied to rumor than to actual study of this principle of growth.
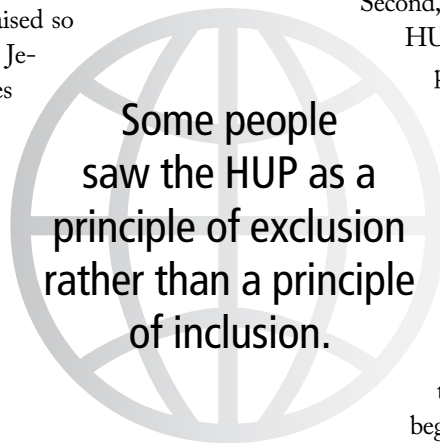
Seventh, it is my observation that some people see the HUP as perpetuating racism. This is perhaps the primary criticism arising from North America. When the HUP was presented, North Americans often saw it through the lens of a history of slavery. If such a criticism is true, and I do not believe it is, it was never part of McGavran's understanding of the HUP. He felt it was wrong to use the HUP, or any other principle for that matter, as an excuse to maintain exclusive churches. As he told Wasdale, "they must not use it [HUP] to defend prideful exclusive segregated congregations." He continued by saying that the HUP "too rigorously applied, arrays itself against . . . brotherhood and 'one-ness' in Christ."[20]

In direct opposition to this inflammatory criticism, Mc-Gavran understood the HUP to be a part of the process toward full fellowship. In his letter to Marty he wrote, "I and others using the Homogeneous Unit Principle are with you a hundred percent in your conviction that brotherhood and unity are of the essence."[21] While brotherhood was, and is, extremely important, McGavran believed it could never be attained without the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Thus, it was necessary that people first be evangelized within their own homogeneous unit, and afterward discipled to move beyond their own group to embrace those of other groups. He was also concerned that brotherhood not become an addition to the simple gospel of salvation in Christ alone. Brotherhood, he asserted, "is a fruit of the Christian life, not a pre-condition for faith in Christ."[22]

> The primary criticism of the HUP was that it perpetuated racism.
> If such a criticism is true,
> it was never part of McGavran's understanding.

Given the complex nature of Christian ministry, there likely are additional reasons that others have concerning the HUP, but these are ones I have observed over nearly a half-century of ministry. Former missionary, Walther A. Olsen, may have summarized the many misunderstandings of the HUP best. After noting a litany of criticisms of the HUP, he wrote, "These accusations—echoed repeatedly by the misinformed—confront us with a perplexing hostility."[23] The more the critics protest, the clearer becomes the underlying problem: a misunderstanding of the meaning and role of the homogeneous unit principle.

What Is the Reality? How Fellowships of Believers Multiply

The reality is churches continue to be built around homogeneity. Indeed, the HUP is to human socialization like gravity is to science—it is a law. Take, for instance, a description by one of the critics of the HUP of his own church.

> We planted Cambridge Community Fellowship in 1996 with the support of my former church in Maryland. We began with about eight people and have steadily grown. Today we have 250 regular attenders.
>
> Located off Massachusetts Avenue, between Harvard and MIT, we are two subway stops away from Tufts University and a couple of bus stops from Boston University. Many of our attenders come from these four colleges. Another contingent comes from Wellesley College (about 20 miles away), a handful from Northeastern University, and then the rest is our post-college population, people who work in the Boston area year-round.
>
> Because we draw so many thoughtful college students, who are bent on inquiry, it's hard to be superficial at our church. We have to dig deeply into issues and think through things carefully.
>
> Ministering to a congregation so intellectually driven keeps a pastor on his toes.[24]

While the writer's church was located near a low-income housing project, and it likely included a mix of people from various ethnic and socioeconomic groups, its primary homogeneous unit was educated, college and post-college individuals. The homogeneity is obvious to anyone with a clear understanding of the HUP and church growth eyes.

In Conclusion: The Affinity that Holds a Church Together

I submit that every church is a homogeneous church. The primary glue that holds churches together, of course, is our common belief in Jesus Christ. However, there is always a secondary contextual glue, which we often call *affinity*. When we label a church a teaching church or a social action church or a soul-winning church, we are in many respects explaining its homogeneity. When churches are formed around a common passion of demonstrating the oneness of people from different ethnic groups, economic groups, or social strata, they are still homogeneous. Churches that are multiethnic are homogeneous! Multiethnicity becomes their homogeneity.

> Even if the HUP might have been better presented, and even if the HUP has been exploited by some, the HUP critics are guilty of grossly misjudging and misinterpreting this concept. It deserves better.[25]

Perhaps our gathering is a beginning to a better understanding of what McGavran rightfully taught and believed. **IJFM**

Endnotes

1 For the full story of McGavran's missionary career see, Gary L. McIntosh, *Donald A. McGavran: A Biography of the Twentieth Century's Premier Missiologist,* (Boca Raton, FL: Church Leader Insights, 2015).

2 Vernon James Middleton, "The Development of a Missiologist: The Life and Thought of Donald Anderson McGavran, 1897–1965" (PhD diss., Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1990), 126.

3 McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth,* 1970.

4 See the "References" for Yoder, "Church Growth Issues," 1973; Yoder, "The Homogeneous Unit Concept in Ethical Perspective," 1977; Costas, *The Church and its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World,* 1974; Hayward and McGavran, "Without Crossing Barriers? One in Christ vs. Discipling Diverse Cultures" 1974; Hayward, "The Homogeneous Unit Principle and the Record Worldwide Missionary Expansion," 1977; Conn, "The Praxis of a Covenant Ethos," 1977; Conn, "Looking for a Method," 1983; Padilla, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle," 1977; Dubose, *How Churches Grow in an Urban World,* 1978; Newbigin, *The Open Secret,* 1978; and Marty, *The Public Church,* 1981.

5 "Lausanne Occasional Paper 1," The Pasadena Consultation: Homogeneous Unit Principle, Pasadena, CA 1978, https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-1.

6 DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church,* 2007; and Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity,* 2009.

7 Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India,* 1933.

8 McGavran, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," 56.

9 McGavran, "How Great Races are Christianized," 43.

10 Personal communication from Donald McGavran to David Wasdale, October 30, 1979.

11 Donald McGavran in a letter to Donald Hoke, April 29, 1974.

12 McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth,* 85.

13 McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth,* 85–86.

14 McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth,* 198.

15 McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth,* 190.

16 McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth,* 190.

17 Donald McGavran in a letter to Martin Marty, April 24, 1978.

18 McGavran to Marty, 1978.

19 McGavran to Wasdale, 1979.

20 McGavran to Wasdale, 1979

21 McGavran to Marty, 1978.

22 McGavran to Wasdale, 1979.

23 Olson, "The Homogeneous Unit Principle Revisited," 1.

24 Rah, "Navigating Cultural Currents," 38–40.

25 Olson, "The Homogeneous Unit Principle Revisited," 4.

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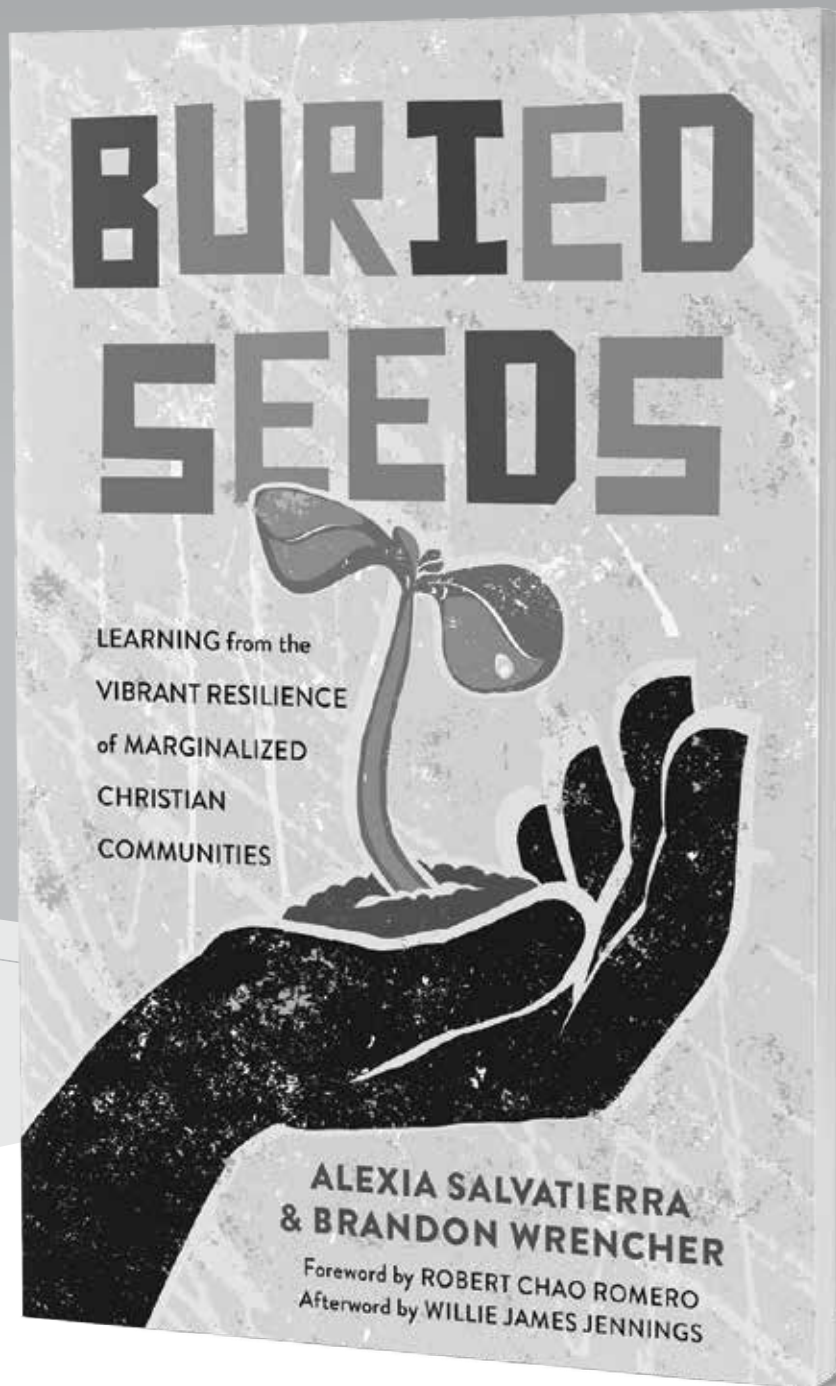
Revisiting the Homogeneous Unit Principle

The HUP Debate and its Impact on Missions:
Reflections on Lausanne's 1977 Consultation

by Greg H. Parsons

Greg H. Parsons has served with Frontier Ventures (formerly US Center for World Mission) since 1982, twenty-seven of those years while Dr. Ralph D. Winter was alive. In 2012 he completed his PhD dissertation (University of Wales Trinity Saint David) on Winter's life up to 1976—the year the USCWM was founded. Greg currently serves as Global Connections Specialist and Curator for the Ralph D. Winter Research Center.

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Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church is perhaps the poster child of Church Growth in the US. He did his DMin at Fuller and read all he could by the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission (SWM).[1] He has a deep passion to see people become Christians. He has thought a lot about what first-time visitors think when they visit a church. He believes the question they are asking themselves is: *Is there anybody here like me?*[2]

This is an example of on-the-ground application of the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP), which is: *People like to become Christians with others who are like them.*

Warren is looking at that idea from the perspective of evangelism—growing churches by bringing people to faith. Others tend to look at the question of what the church will look like as new believers mature. What does, or even *should,* a local church look like as it matures and seeks to present a unified witness to a diverse world? Will the local fellowship reflect its context, if you focus on homogeneity or "others who are like them?"

It is just as crucial to try and see the perspective of the person who is not yet a follower of Christ as it is to understand what a new church might look like in its worship, fellowship, and witness. As we seek to bring people to Christ, we adjust our message to fit their understanding and context. We call this contextualization. The question here is, how should we adjust what we do in a local church anywhere in the world, while: 1) staying true to the Scriptures, 2) relating well to the specific cultural context, and yet, 3) still challenging people with truth that transforms. As the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship Steering Committee worked on this theme and invited presenters, it was our hope that we all would *grow in our understanding* of these issues and how they *related to God's purposes* in the spread of his glory to all peoples—or as Paul said it in Romans 1:5b, "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations. . . ."

Let me take us back a bit, to the broader cultural context when this was discussed in 1977.

The Context of the 1970s

A number of social and geopolitical issues helped shape the experiences of all those involved in the 1977 Consultation. More broadly, the decolonization of Asia and Africa had been taking place from the late 1940s to 1975. This was parallel to the rise of the Cold War, the fears of nuclear attack, and the threat of the spread of Communism to these brand-new countries. In the US, this decolonization paralleled the Vietnam War (which ended in 1973) and all the national protests that went with it along with the hippie movement, the spread of illegal drugs, and the sexual revolution.[3]

In the music world you had: The Beatles, Bob Dylan, and the 1967 "summer of love." Worldwide, music festivals also occurred: Woodstock in the US, Peidra Rohain in Chile, and Aquarius in Australia. Through those and other events, a vocal minority of the youth of the world were speaking out and protesting. The world—at least the Western, non-Communist world—seemed to be listening.

Of course, in the 1960s, *racial tensions were high in the US.* Government-mandated school bussing to integrate schools began in 1971—and was also resisted in many places.

Allow me a somewhat personal illustration. My wife grew up in Dallas and started high school in 1972. The first day, a food fight broke out at lunch, and she vividly remembers a chair flying over her head as she quietly sat eating. Thankfully, she was not the target or the cause! She left her lunch and ran out of the cafeteria as a big fight started. Perhaps more vivid to her was that at the end of that first day of school, as she walked out the front door of the school, the street was blocked off and lined with helmeted police officers holding clubs!

In the Christian missions world, debates about Church Growth theory started long before 1977. McGavran's book, *Bridges of God,*[4] was, according to Frank Price (the librarian of the highly regarded Missionary Research Library at Yale Divinity School), the "most read missionary book in 1956."[5] While the HUP idea was popularized in his best-known book, *Understanding Church Growth*[6] the ideas began to form during his experiences in India in the 1930–40s with Wascom Pickett.

McGavran's work generated a number of events, some that promoted Church Growth theory, and others that questioned it. There were consultations, trainings, and seminars on the topic. The *Church Growth Bulletin* was published from

1964 to 1979.[7] Books were published like *How Biblical is the Church Growth Movement?* by Robertson McQuilkin.[8] In the same year, the Institute of Mennonite Studies published *The Challenge of Church Growth: A Symposium.*[9] Many more events and publications could be listed.

Naturally, the faculty of the SWM were teaching around the country and the world. The numerous locations where they were invited to teach were noted in the faculty minutes from the 1960s into the early 70s. They held a regular Church Growth lecture series with visiting scholars on the Fuller campus. SWM faculty members Donald McGavran, Ralph Winter, C. Peter Wagner, and others did Church Growth seminars on other campuses around the US, such as Biola and Nyack.

> The Lausanne 1974 Congress on World Evangelization had raised so many issues and concerns that follow up was necessary.

On the global evangelical stage, the Lausanne 1974 Congress had significant input from the SWM. There was no other faculty of similar size and breadth of experience in US seminaries. Most schools had just one or two professors who had served cross-culturally, if any. Billy Graham, who had called for the Lausanne meeting, had deep connections with Fuller Seminary, and liked what he saw in the SWM. At his request, Donald McGavran helped Graham shape his opening message since it was not a typical "evangelistic sermon." In addition, Graham wanted McGavran's help to focus the Congress. Along with McGavran and Ralph Winter, other Fuller faculty led seminars or workshops at the Congress, including Alan Tippett and Fuller Seminary's president, David Hubbard.[10]

The 1977 Consultation

The Lausanne 1974 Congress on World Evangelization raised so many issues and concerns that follow up was necessary, and the faculty of the School of World Mission took it on. The fact that John R. W. Stott was the moderator gave the meeting credibility. Stott and Bishop Jack Dane were the two main players helping to shape the 1974 Congress, and Stott was the main architect of the Lausanne Covenant, and later wrote up that process in a book on the event.[11]

Two of the key factors that seemed to motivate the SWM faculty were: *first,* their exposure to what appeared to be the significant work of the Holy Spirit in other cultures around the world; and *second,* more than ten years of interaction and study with field-experienced students—specifically about church growth.[12] They had begun to see more clearly where the church was growing and where it was not. For that reason, in 1977, the SWM sponsored a consultation on the Lausanne Congress' most controversial idea, the Homogeneous Unit Principle.
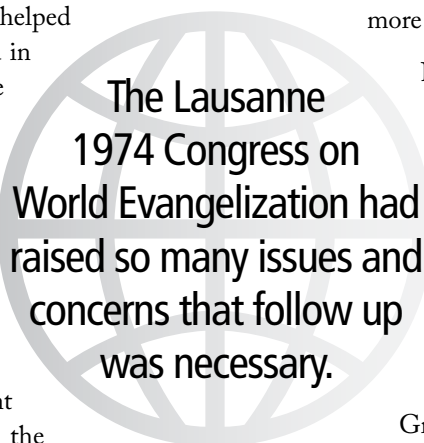
The Key SWM Speakers

Donald McGavran had crisscrossed India, and in 1954, when he began to travel extensively outside of India, he hitchhiked some 5,780 km or almost 3,600 miles across Africa. In all, throughout his life, he visited more than eighty countries—specifically to see what was happening in the growth of the church in different situations.[13]

Chuck Kraft had completed a PhD in anthropology and linguistics, growing out of his deep commitment to understanding and respecting other people's cultures. Originally from a Brethren background, he and his family had gone to Nigeria where he planned on doing translation work with the Kamwe, but local needs led him to work with church leaders and nurture a people movement among them.[14]

Ralph D. Winter had worked with established churches in the rural highlands of Guatemala. By initiating Theological Education by Extension (TEE) with his colleagues Jim Emery and Ross Kinsler, and by starting seventeen businesses, Winter had helped Mayan young men become bi-vocational, self-supporting pastors. He had also traveled extensively in Central and South America, as well as South and East Asia, promoting and training church leaders in TEE.[15]

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Arthur Glasser worked in China for six years, under the China Inland Mission (now OMF). He and his wife Alice served in a tribe in the Yunnan Province on the Southwest frontier. Many people from this group had come to Christ in a significant people movement, and that continued. The Glassers would have stayed in China, but in 1949, the Communists took over, and by 1953 all missionaries had been expelled. He taught for one year at Columbia Bible College and then became Candidate Secretary and later Home Secretary (US Director) for OMF-US in Philadelphia for fifteen years. During that time, he also taught at Westminster Seminary.[16]

C. Peter Wagner served in Bolivia, initially going there to work in agriculture, but quickly ended up training local pastors, and still later, helped establish new churches, taught at a seminary, and was involved in mission leadership.[17]

Once back in the West, these SWM professors easily saw that the vibrancy of non-Western churches was not present in the West. Many of the denominations they were part of were declining in attendance and sending fewer missionaries.

Yet around the globe, the growth of the church was staggering in places like Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia—such as Korea. In 1977, no one outside China (and perhaps inside) knew what was happening in the Chinese House Church movement. It was not until January 1979 when the first issue of *China and the Church Today*[18] was published that Jonathan Chao of the Chinese Church Research Center in Hong Kong began to share his breakthrough research.[19] At first, no one believed him.[20] Finally, in the 1980s the world heard the literally "unbelievable news" of what God had done since 1949 in the largest known sustained expansion of the gospel.[21]

The Key Responding Speakers

Those who were asked to respond to the five SWM presentations had their own shaping experiences—some with cross-cultural experience or exposure.

Harvey M. Conn (responder to McGavran) taught leaders of growing churches in Korea for ten years and later taught at Westminster Theological Seminary for twenty-five years. He was a highly regarded theologian and missiologist.[22]

Robert L. Ramseyer (responder to Kraft) was affiliated with the General Conference Mennonite Church and served in Japan. After his PhD in Cultural Anthropology, he split his time between Japan and teaching missions at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.[23]

Victor E. W. Hayward (responder to Ralph Winter) was with the British Missionary Society (BMS). He served in China including time as the British Secretary of the National Christian Council of China. He led the BMS for eight years, and ultimately worked at the World Council of Churches in missions studies and later as Associate General Secretary serving national and regional Christian councils.[24]

C. René Padilla (responder to Glasser) also presented at Lausanne. He was born in Ecuador and grew up in Columbia. He earned a PhD in New Testament (NT) under F. F. Bruce at the University of Manchester. He served with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) working with university students throughout Latin America and other ministries globally. He argued that the HUP strategy did not grow out of the NT model of what the church is to be.[25]

John H. Yoder, responding to Wagner on ethical issues with HUP, was the premier theologian and ethicist of the Mennonite tradition.[26] He argued that if a church was not reflective of the cultures around it from the beginning, there would be no basis of authority to help it to move that direction as it matured.[27]

In addition, there were twenty-seven participant consultants who also attended the event.[28]

The Discussion
Location Matters

There are about fifteen hours of audio recordings of the discussions that took place at the 1977 Consultation.[29] Apparently, the presenters did not read their papers, which had been circulated ahead of time, but instead referred to them, drawing out points they wanted to emphasize and for which they wanted input during the discussion.[30] A number of instances and examples from each "side," sought to illustrate what the HUP meant, and what its impact was—for good or ill. One discussion contrasted what a church of "suburbanites" in the US might be like versus a church of prostitutes. One participant [31] shared about his ministry to prostitutes in a city in Latin America.

In one exchange, early in the recording, John R. W. Stott argued that a local church should reflect its local community.[32] Here is his exchange with Donald McGavran:

> *Stott:* But can I immediately respond to that, because—does it not depend on the nature of the community within which the local church is situated? If the local community is itself homogeneous, that is, if it is a suburban American, upper class, highly educated community—the whole of the community—I cannot myself see how anybody would object to the local church reflecting that. But I would go further and say that there would be no point in some kind of ecclesiastical busing arrangements, by which (in order to make ourselves heterogeneous), we were to bus in a lot of people who've not had our education, and who earn less than a five-figure salary.
>
> *McGavran:* You're taking a very controversial position.
>
> *Stott:* Well, I don't know. I mean, what I'm trying to throw into the debate, is that it depends. There is a relative element here because, it seems to me, the local church ought to be a local church—it ought to be a local, a geographically local, outcrop of the church universal. And therefore, it must reflect the situation of the local community.

Various Perspectives

A foundational element, with both sides of the debate presented, was the area of Bible and theology. Conn, Wagner, Glasser, and Padilla presented on HUP from a biblical perspective. Additional topics connecting HUP to anthropology, history, and ethics, were also presented, each of which included biblical references. It is nevertheless still difficult to summarize, since the Scriptures lend themselves to a range of perspectives and interpretation. This is especially true as you approach them as a grand story, that somehow, amazingly, we all fit into.

The Impact of the HUP on Missions
A Contemporary Asian Movement to Christ

It may be helpful to share a case study from one who has tried to apply this in a cross-cultural setting. This is from a western brother who has been in Asia for twenty-nine years, observing and serving a *very* large movement to Christ there. He has come alongside and works very closely with about fifteen local leaders, whom he calls "apostle-like catalysts." Almost no non-Asians are involved in this movement.

> ## The believers in this movement span seventy-eight people groups in seventeen countries, include 500,000 individuals, all in small groups with recognized leaders and are traced to seventeen generations.

The believers in this movement span seventy-eight different people groups in seventeen different countries and include almost 500,000 individuals,[33] all in small groups with recognized leaders and are traced to seventeen generations or more in some parts. This is all tracked by the local leaders, with careful detail. They only count new believers from a Muslim heritage—though nominal Christians have also gotten involved in these groups.

In this quote, from his perspective, you'll see how he observes what happened in the Book of Acts, how the gospel is unleashed from Jewish culture and language, and how that might apply today. You can also note how he applies this in his setting and to the idea of HUP in general. (emphases and brackets in the quotations below are mine)

> In the Bible we see segmentation of populations as important to understand its influence on the spread of the gospel. By Acts 6 there were at least 20,000 Jewish believers (Acts 4:4). Two HUs, one the Aramaic-speaking Jews and one the Greek-speaking Jews, came into conflict along ethnic/language segment lines. When they chose the seven, they chose seven men with *Greek names* for their second layer of leadership, [which the] volume [of] growth demanded, so that the segment that felt underserved would be well represented. *I don't see anyone pushing for more religious diversification or less; they needed to accommodate the natural barriers as they observed God bringing growth and adjusting to it.*
>
> When there was a great persecution forcing many out of Jerusalem, it was only the Aramaic segment that could stay. That seems to have crystalized a more Pharisaic

segment of believers in Jerusalem, judging from the issue in Acts 15, and from the issue in Acts 21, but they kept growing. Commentators estimate 30,000 believers in Acts 21, even though many of the first 20,000 had fled. The *bilingual, bicultural Hellenistic Jews* were the people God used to spread the gospel to the *diaspora Jews first, and then to God-fearers, then to non-Jews.* The bilingual biculturalists were the bridging agents that carried the gospel across barriers into new population segments.

Then he applied this to his movement

> . . . we find marriages of two different cultures are, quite often, able to bridge cultures with the gospel. We have [main culture/language] who understand our principles move to [similar culture/language] communities [nearby], who [in turn] are bilingual, also knowing the languages of local UPGs. About two years after they move, the gospel has moved into the bilingual [main culture/language], and then moved through them to the population segments that are more "defined/discrete."

According to him, the gospel moved from one culture and language to a nearby similar culture and similar language and then from there went on to spread to seventy-eight different people groups, (as defined by JoshuaProject.net). He then shared his assessment about HUP itself:

> In the NT, I don't think we have a pushing of anybody to religiously diversify—or not. But rather a recognition of *what God is doing, and how God is using certain kinds of bilinguals to bridge into each new people segment.* These "bridging agents" role can be better understood by studying Social Network Analysis. . . .[34] (emphasis mine)

He suggests we no longer use the phrase Homogeneous Unit, and instead use something like "people segmentation." My initial thought is that we could use a broad, "cultural segmentation" or "distinction." This seems to be reflected in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9, and perhaps in Revelation 21:22–27 where the "kings of the earth bring their glory to it." It seems that the glory is being embedded in the cultures of the earth, since it doesn't seem like it could be the greatness of the kings who have ruled in the Bible at least!

Experiences of the SWM Faculty and Graduates

This example, and others from distinct cultures globally, demonstrate the influence of the SWM ideas, among others of course. That can also be seen in the theses and dissertations produced there during those years.[35] There was also the immediate impact of those early SWM graduates, most of whom had served six to eight years before studying there. I've read or heard testimonies of workers around the world who had almost given up and come home, only to be energized by the ideas they "hashed out," and the relationships they developed, while thinking and studying together at the SWM, or the US Center for World Mission.

Here is one example in a January 1970 letter, written by a field missionary in Honduras. It was forwarded to McGavran by Rufus Jones, the General Director of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society:

> There is a spirit of tremendous expectancy among the workers here now. We are putting into practice much of the principles of the church growth people, especially that of *communicating the gospel along family and clan relationships lines.* It is a very difficult principle for an American to grasp, but I am beginning to discover how it works. And it does work! There is a definite pattern of family ties and interrelationships along which the gospel can easily be communicated—if we are looking for it—which does not exist in our American society. Unfortunately, it requires a radical change in our method of approach in any village; and change does not come easy for these poorly educated workers. But Lord willing, it will be done!
>
> [Signed:] George [No last name was included.]
>
> Olanchito, Honduras [36]

I realize that the nature of our current, multicultural America (and other places) was not the situation in the 1970s. The HUP idea was just one of the ideas that came out of the SWM and other mission thinkers or trainers in those years. But I think it helps us understand how they were processing these ideas, as we now look at what happened in the years after the 1970s.

> ## "There is a spirit of tremendous expectancy among the workers now. We are putting into practice much of the principles of church growth, especially communicating the gospel along family and clan relationships lines."

The time the SWM faculty spent teaching and interacting with each other and the students allowed them to see what was missing on the global scene. Ralph Winter used to say that they didn't have any students coming to study who had been sent to where no missionaries were! He was talking about the blocs of Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist Unreached People Groups. These are cultures that are radically different from where there was a culturally relevant church. And that remains true for many today.[37]

At the time of the 1977 Consultation, Winter had already moved from his tenured position at the SWM, to start the US Center for World Mission (USCWM) with his wife Roberta—

really with his whole family. Looking at the charts published in the version of his Lausanne presentation,[38] you can see how he understands the "task remaining"—especially where there was no indigenous church. When he gave his Lausanne '74 talk, he included an illustration from Pakistan—there the church was established in the non-Muslim minority (former Dalits who had become Christians) and there was almost no interaction between the Muslims and the Christians at the time.

Personally, I remember seeing those simply-made and jaw-dropping charts late one evening, just one month before the USCWM was founded in October 1976. That evening moved me to a new level of action.

For his part, C. Peter Wagner focused his interest in helping to promote Church Growth theories wherever the church already existed. Some used to say that Wagner was focused on seeing the church *grow where it was,* and Winter was focused on helping the church *go where it wasn't.* Still, Wagner published *On the Crest of the Wave* which detailed breakthroughs around the world. Winter worked hard to get that book out as an encouragement to the church. Before that, many saw the UPGs as a massive task, like lifting an iceberg out of the sea.

The Shift from Countries to People Groups

More broadly, a significant impact of all of this was that the mobilization call to missions shifted from a focus on countries to people groups. The rhetorical argument went, "How can you only say you are going to reach Nigerians, for example, when there are 400 different cultures and languages there, most of whom do not have a Bible translation?"

The approach to the Bible also shifted, including how it was used to motivate people for service. In the first five lessons of the *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* course, the biblical theme of God's purposes throughout the earth is traced through the Scriptures. God is seeking to extend his name among the ethné or people groups. John Stott's first Urbana 1976 morning Bible message, "The Living God is a Missionary God," which makes this point, is still the first chapter in the reader *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement.*
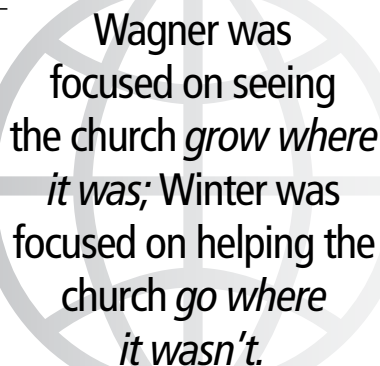
You can find a more complete evaluation of what was happening as part of a recent issue of the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ)* dedicated to the theme: "Rethinking People Group Missiology."[39] I wrote an article for that issue entitled, "Run with the Vision: The Impact of the Unreached People Groups Concept on Students, Churches and Sending Agencies."[40]

> Wagner was focused on seeing the church *grow where it was;* Winter was focused on helping the church *go where it wasn't.*

When you move from teachers, writers, and strategists to young people being called into missions, you begin to see the impact of their service, both positive and negative. In the 1980s, young people started asking sending agencies if they worked with the "unreached." (I am not suggesting that no one worked with the unreached before.) When they got to the field, with purpose and clear direction (perhaps a higher value in the West?), they seemed to want to narrow their focus to a specific unreached group needing gospel witness. Their rationale might be summed up as follows: if there is an established church in the majority people, we will instead focus on the groups that don't have the gospel.

Such a strategy was probably the best in many areas. There were a number of places where long-established churches in one culture were near an unreached culture. One classic example is the ancient churches of the Middle East. I recall the story Bob Blincoe shared, when he was trying to reach Muslim Kurds in Northern Iraq. Christians in the area, from church traditions dating back 500 to 1000 years or so, told him they knew the solution to the "problem of the Kurds": Get rid of the Kurds! And it didn't sound very Christian!

That is an example of one of the hardest ideas to communicate related to reaching to the unreached: most of the groups of the world, who do not now have a church, are **not** isolated nor clearly and completely distinct from the peoples around them. Back then, in the early 80s, when I shared the vision of the USCWM while raising support to serve here, people didn't easily understand the UPG concept. I needed to say that other than most Tribal Peoples, we were NOT talking about groups that are "hermetically sealed off" from the rest of the world—like the typical group Wycliffe was trying to do a translation for. India's complex caste system was always a striking illustration—yet the most difficult for Westerners to fully grasp. McGavran would talk about how in one village in India, people look the same, speak the same language, but are hermetically sealed off like overlapping "pancakes." Sometimes when people with the UPG strategy would hit the ground in multiethnic communities; something was missing. From his experience as an SIM field worker in West Africa, Ken Baker wrote an article in the *EMQ* about the potential misunderstanding of the HUP issue.

> Since the UPG/UUPG system assumes the validity of the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) too exclusively as an organizational formula, it often fails to take into account God's intent to reconcile people, and peoples, to each other.

HUP-based approaches concentrate solely upon the expansion narrative ("make disciples of all nations") of kingdom mission while neglecting the integration narrative of Christ's kingdom mission ("that all of them may be one"). Gospel intent always envisions boundary-crossing and engaging otherness.[41]

He noticed this strategy could influence the mentality of new international workers, because "the people group approach creates a presumptive mentality which pre-shapes church planting endeavors, creating arbitrary fences in the ministry context."[42]

Then, he illustrated this:

A few years ago, while church planting (or, as I prefer, "gospel planting") in an African desert country, I encountered a young missionary couple who were entirely focused on a people group that made up less than five percent of the local population. Gifted in language, they were deeply integrated, but exclusively in relationships with this people.

Although "their" people group mixed well with the local population, this couple didn't, because they didn't want to become "distracted." They viewed their approach as missiologically faultless. However, other people in the community viewed them as cold, unfriendly, and haughty. To me, this seemed like a classic case of missing the forest for the trees. I asked them what gospel they were modeling before "their" people, as well as the community, reminding them that we are always ambassadors of an all-inclusive gospel, even if we concentrate upon one people.[43]

Where Are We Now?

Today, in our evangelical, and ex-evangelical world, a debate like this can be polarizing. With many US churches divided by politics and racial tensions, nuance no longer seems possible. Not to mention the "c" word: contextualization. Anthropology is no longer considered something helpful in the training of global workers, which I consider a step back in worker preparation.

Multiethnic and Multiracial Churches

At the International Society for Frontier Mission gathering in 2014, I presented a paper, "Will the Earth Hear His Voice? Is Ralph D. Winter's Idea Still Valid?"[44] Near the end, I posed some questions to consider for those who promote starting a multiethnic church and who had written about it in *EMQ*.[45]

How many of the multi-ethnic church members were Christians (of some sort) before they joined the church, or how many came from "Christianized" backgrounds, either their own family or their own "Christianized" culture in general?

Is English the common language of worship and teaching?

How many came to Christ and to this multi-ethnic church from non-Christian religious backgrounds, such as a Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist religious tradition?

My guess would be very few, if any. As great as the merging of worship, dress styles and language might be, only those familiar with or wanting to identify with these Christian forms (and the English language) are likely to feel at home in such a church. Where I live in Los Angeles, there are many different languages spoken in churches and most of those who go to services that are not in English simply cannot switch to English without a loss of understanding (connected with teaching) and relationships (connected with fellowship). These are two key aspects of what the New Testament expects in a local church.

I realize that the goal of churches like this is not necessarily to see people from unreached people groups join their church. If people are coming to Christ and growing that is great. I found it interesting, however, that *Christianity Today* sought to grapple with the issue of multiracial churches in the US in their print magazine in March of 2021. The theme was "Multiracial Reckoning: Can Multiethnic Worship Really Happen on this Side of Heaven?" Korie Little Edwards, author of the book *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*, also wrote the lead article in that *CT* issue, "When 'Diversity' Isn't Enough." In it she notes:

Multiracial congregations have gained a greater share of American churches over the past 20 years, but as my colleagues and I have found, they are not delivering on what they promised. Multiracial churches often celebrate being diverse for diversity's sake. They aren't challenging racial attitudes that reinforce systemic inequality. . . . Over time, whites end up occupying the roles in the church with the most authority.[46]

> Although their minority people group mixed well with the local population, this couple didn't because they didn't want to become "distracted." Other people in the community viewed them as unfriendly, and haughty. (Baker)

Engaging the Public Square Today

Let me illustrate the broader contextualization point that I believe connects with both the HUP and how we shape our message depending on the audience. This is from a recent tweet from NY pastor Timothy Keller.[47] Keller first tweeted a response to a six-minute YouTube clip from The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.[48] Colbert was interviewing Dua Lipa who is from the UK, was formerly a model, and is now a

singer and songwriter. Lipa asks Colbert how his faith and his comedy overlap. Colbert gives a masterful reply—unscripted. It is fascinating to watch her face when the camera switches to her a few times, as he shares his reply. She seems clearly interested and engaged with a "religious" discussion.

The next day, Keller tweeted the clip and wrote:

> This is a brilliant example of how to be a Christian in the public square. Notice the witness, but in a form the culture can handle. We should desire to have more Christians in these spaces and give them grace as they operate.

While some loved his approach, for others it created a firestorm, with ensuing comments about how he didn't share the *whole* gospel. Colbert is Catholic after all. One retweet said: "Let's not call something a witness or a gospel presentation which does not involve Christ, sin, his substitutionary atoning death, his resurrection, etc.,"[49] as if when certain truths are not included, it is not sharing the gospel. To which I ask: is not creation a witness of the gospel? Did Jesus or Paul ever include all of that in one passage or message?

While some loved Stephen Colbert's approach, for others it created a firestorm, with ensuing comments about how he didn't share the *whole* gospel.

The next day, Keller replied with a seven-part Tweet:[50]

> The recent post I made about Stephen Colbert's partial answer about his faith and the ensuing comments has shown me American Christians still have a long way to go on understanding Col. 4:5–6, how to be "wise in the ways you act toward outsiders."

> This is called contextualization.

> What is contextualization? It's adapting your message to be understandable and compelling to particular hearers without compromising the truth in any way. Why contextualize?

> *First,* because everyone already does it. As soon as you choose a language to speak in, and vocabulary and illustrations, and arguments, you are adapting to some human hearers more than others. If you don't become conscious of how you are contextualizing–which is inevitable–you won't contextualize well.

> *Second,* because Paul contextualizes in his speeches. See how he presents to Bible believers in Acts 13, blue-collar pagans in Acts 14, and educated pagans in Acts 17.

> *Third,* because the biblical writers contextualize. See John's use of Greek philosophy's "Logos" in John 1. See the use of the Hittite Sumerian treaty form in the book of Deuteronomy. See Paul's contextualization of the gospel to Greek and Jewish cultural narratives in 1 Cor. 1:22-24.

> *Fourth,* because Paul calls us to contextualization without compromise in 1 Cor. 9:19–23.

> *Fifth,* because the incarnation itself was a kind of contextualizing. So, we could understand—the Word made flesh.

> *Sixth,* keep in mind you can't and shouldn't say everything every time when bearing a public witness to your faith. In Acts 17 Paul spoke of judgment but not of the cross or how to get forgiveness. So, it wasn't a full gospel presentation. It was laying a foundation for talking to people later.

Unless Christians are completely going to pull themselves out of the public square we will need to contextualize. Let's do so well.

Two days later, Keller added:

> Over-contextualization makes an idol of the hearers' culture and is the mistake of liberal Christianity. Under-contextualization makes an idol of the speaker's culture and is the mistake of fundamentalist Christianity. *We all make both mistakes—but which do you do more?* (emphasis mine)

Conclusion

We are always in a process of trying to understand how to see more people come to faith, and grow. We never "get it right" all the time, but my hope is that, looking back at this 1977 event and evaluating it in today's context in this Lectureship, we might gain helpful perspectives which will help us think through what ideas we should promote or avoid. There is a beauty in the diversity God has created in the ethné. We have much to learn from that, as they bring glory to God. **IJFM**

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Lausanne Web Editor's Note: The positions indicated for the participants [(speakers], moderator, and consultants) remain those as of June 1977 when the consultation met.

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Endnotes

[1] This was changed to the School of Intercultural Studies and now is merged as the School of Mission and Theology.

[2] Rick Warren quote from the Carey Nieuwhof Podcast interview, January 3, 2022.

[3] The US ended their involvement in 1973. The Ralph D. Winter Research Center and Archives has a letter that was circulated by an ethnically Armenian student at Fuller Seminary in 1970. He suggested Fuller Seminary should not allow a protest to the war during graduation ceremonies, in part because there were other wars around the world, including one related to Armenia.

[4] McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, 1955.

[5] Middleton, *Donald McGavran, His Early Life and Ministry*, 125.

[6] McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 1970.

[7] Later published in book form, Volume One covered September 1964 through July 1969 (McGavran, *Church Growth Bulletin*, 1969), Volume Two from September 1969 to July 1975 (McGavran, *Church Growth Bulletin*, 1977), and Volume Three from September 1975 to November 1979 (McGavran, Montgomery, and Wagner, *Church Growth Bulletin*, 1982).

[8] McQuilkin, *How Biblical is the Church Growth Movement?*, 1973.

[9] Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *The Challenge of Church Growth. A Symposium* (1973), 107.

[10] Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 1975.

[11] Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant*, 1975.

[12] This was the pattern of the early days of the SWM. Students, or "associates" as they called them, were required to have at least one "term" (two were preferred) of cross-cultural ministry before entering the school. There were special exceptions.

[13] Email from Vern Middleton to Greg H. Parsons, Feb. 21, 2011, page 1: In addition to McGavran's early field work in administration and his researching of people movements with Pickett in India, he was involved later in a movement among the Satnami, as detailed in McGavran, *The Satnami Story*, 1990.

[14] Kraft, *SWM/SIS at Forty: A Participant/Observer's View of Our History*, 2005.

[15] Parsons, *Ralph D. Winter: Early Life and Core Missiology*, 2012.

[16] Glasser came to Fuller's SWM at a crucial time and helped solidify the SWM's footing in the midst of the "Bible wars" of the 1970s, which included the inerrancy debate and Fuller Seminary's voice in it. The SWM was trying to make sure that more conservative missions would continue to send their missionaries to the SWM, and not worry about the School of Theology. Kraft, *SWM/SIS at Forty*, 105.

[17] Kraft, *SWM/SIS at Forty*, 101.

[18] Chao, *China and the Church Today*, 1979–1980).

[19] Later, in the US it was known as China Ministries International, and its US offices were based at the US Center for World Mission until 2021. It is still in operation.

[20] In the mid-1980s, Ralph Winter told the story of trying to purchase a print advertisement in *Christianity Today*, outlining this ongoing-breakthrough, and they would not print it because they did not believe the information was true.

[21] Current estimates are 125,000,000.

[22] For example, Timothy Keller has noted Conn's influence in his life, Gornik, "The Legacy of Harvie M. Conn," 215.

[23] Via email to the author from Mark Ramseyer, PhD (son of Victor), March 7, 2022.

[24] "Victor E. W. Hayward."

[25] In René Padilla's presentation at Lausanne, he decried the exporting of a cultural Christianity and the "American way of life" to mission fields around the world, and called for the wedding of evangelism and social action. Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 125–126.

[26] Yoder's books include *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* and *The Politics of Jesus*. A well-known Anabaptist theologian, ethicist, and brilliant political theologian, in his later years he was disciplined after a four-year investigation for his long-term sexual harassment and sexual abuse of women. However, Herald Press, the publisher of many of his books and the publisher for the Mennonite Church USA and the Mennonite Church Canada, believes his writings still deserve to be studied. We include him here to have a complete record of what happened in this HUP consultation in 1977.

[27] Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, 451.

[28] See complete participants listing, as compiled by Lausanne for the Lausanne Occasional Paper #1, at the end of this paper.

[29] Alan Tippett's archives include fifteen hours of recorded discussion during the Consultation. You can find more information at the St. Mark's Theological Centre, Canberra, Australia, https://stmarks.edu.au/library/special-collections/the-tippett-collection/.

[30] It may be a surprise that the discussions were very civil and cordial. There was no shouting nor were there even harsh words.

[31] The Consultants were involved in the discussion some, but did not present papers for the event. The Consultants are listed in the Lausanne Occasional Paper #1, which is a summary of this Consultation.

[32] It is not clear on the first tape, where they are in the discussion. McGavran is talking at first, but it is the end of his thought. It is probable that he just finished presenting some of his ideas.

[33] The growth rate has been consistent from the earliest days in 2000. They had estimated that they would have hit 500,000 before COVID hit and be on their way to a million. They did lose a number of people to COVID, including group leaders.

[34] Email communication in February 2022 with the movement catalyst. For security reasons, the name and locations are withheld. *"Social Network analysis* is the study of structure, and how it influences health, and it is based on theoretical constructs of sociology and mathematical foundations of graph theory. Structure refers to the regularities in the patterning of relationships among individuals, groups and/or organizations. When social network analysis is undertaken, the underlying assumption is that network structure, and the properties of that structure have significant implications on the outcome of interest." https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/social-network-analysis.

[35] If you search the Fuller library online, you will find hundreds of these church growth studies from around the world. A quick search of the Fuller Seminary Library returns more than 2,600 works that contain the words "church growth" in the title.

[36] Copy of a letter from "George" to Rufus Jones, General Director, Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society, January 1, 1970. Jones forwarded a copy of this letter to Donald McGavran, with a cover letter dated January 12, 1970.

[37] See https://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier for definitions and listings of a large subset of Unreached People Groups, called Frontier People Groups.

[38] Ralph Winter's charts for Lausanne 1974 in Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice,* 213–241.

[39] *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 56, no. 4, 2020.

[40] Parsons, "Run with the Vision: The Impact of the Unreached People Groups Concept on Students, Churches and Sending Agencies," 16–19.

[41] Baker, "Beyond 'People Groups': Why the Term 'Communities' May Be Preferable," 10.

[42] Baker, "Beyond 'People Groups'," 11.

[43] Baker, "Beyond 'People Groups'," 13.

[44] Parsons, "Will the Earth Hear His Voice? Is Ralph D. Winter's Idea Still Valid?" 15.

[45] Corwin, "Is It a Heterogeneous or a Homogeneous Unit Principle?" 262–263; and Hyatt, "From Homogeneous to Heterogeneous Unit Principle," 226–232.

[46] Edwards, "When 'Diversity' Isn't Enough," 39.

[47] Timothy Keller, @timkellernyc, posted several tweets on "Being a Christian in the Public Square" starting on February 5, 2022.

[48] The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, "Dua Lipa Asks Stephen How His Faith And His Comedy," February 4, 2022, YouTube video, 6:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUaWDqDOWPk. Her question comes up at 3:38.

[49] Nate @theoloiesus, retweet on February 5, 2022.

[50] I have merged Keller's 7 tweets together, smoothed out the flow and format in order to highlight his points clearly.

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50 Years of Mobilizing for Frontier Missions

"Do not despise the day of small beginnings." These words from the book of Zechariah were prophetically spoken by famed missiologist Arthur Glasser to the inaugural Perspectives class in 1974. The mystery of transformation from a tiny classroom discussion into a sweeping frontier mission seems lost to time.

The fascinating connection between the Perspectives movement, the frontier mission movement, and church planting movements is a story rarely told yet vital to understanding the spread of the gospel to unreached populations. Yvonne Huneycutt's *Propelled by Hope* unfolds the hidden tapestry of these interconnected movements through sixty personal interviews and inspiring anecdotes.

Discover not just history but a spiritual journey that offers lessons, inspiration, and encouragement for today's believers. Whether you are a mission leader, a student of missiology, or someone seeking to understand God's movement in the world, this book will deepen your insight into the strategies, goals, and personal stories that have shaped modern missions.
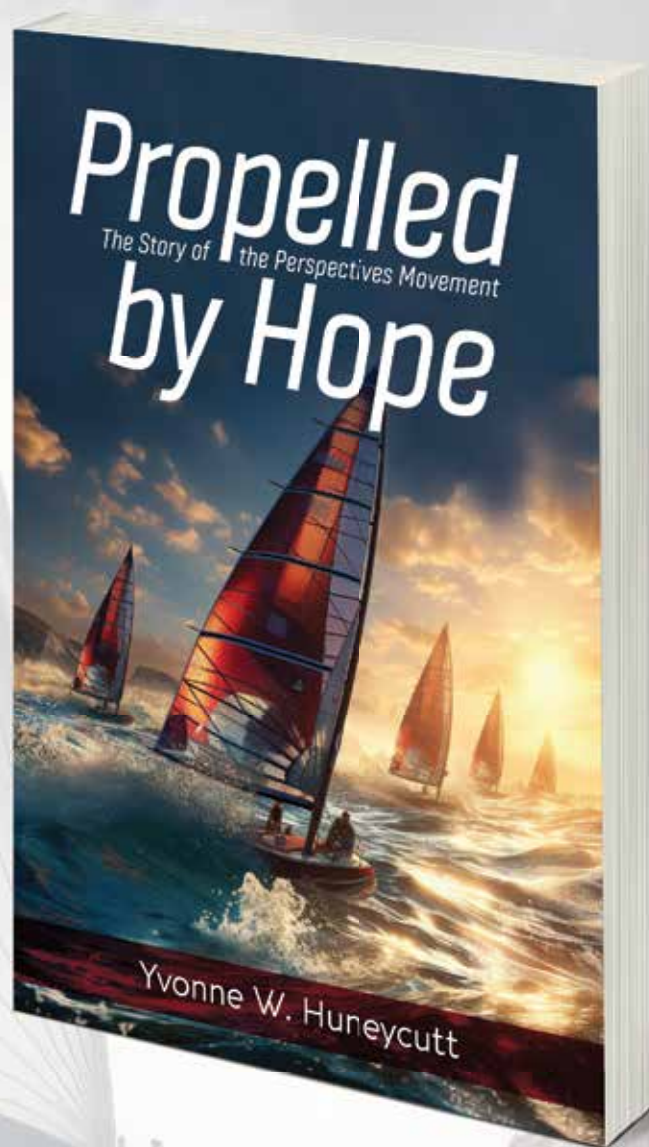
> *Propelled by Hope* is the sweeping narrative of a global movement that started from a seemingly small beginning when Perspectives was launched fifty years ago. Huneycutt's inspiring book reveals how God himself is the movement maker. Today, Perspectives is rapidly spreading through the non-Western world. This excellently researched book reveals why thousands around the world have experienced a radical paradigm shift and have now joined this movement of making His glory known.

MARY HO International Executive Leader, All Nations

Movements, People Groups, and Melting Pots:
A Personal and Historical Retrospective

R. W. Lewis

I n addressing this subject of the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP), I'd like to share some insights I've gained about movements, people groups and melting pots from my personal life, from movements to Christ in history, and from my biblical reflections.[1] My husband and I have spent decades engaged in different cultural contexts and I've personally researched why some peoples either joyfully received or persistently resisted the gospel. The HUP principle, and various ways it manifests itself, is one of the vital sociological realities we have witnessed time and again, and it turns up consistently in the history of Christian movements. I've had the opportunity to observe the realities of cultural homogeneity on five different continents where I have lived for periods of five to fifteen years: Central America, North Africa, the UK, India, and North America. Each context yielded different insights, and I've decided to share those insights in a chronological manner. It's both a delight and a privilege to add this personal perspective on the HUP to this auspicious team of presenters.

Insights from Guatemala

I grew up in Guatemala, where across every region of the country there were Ladinos (or Meztizos) who spoke Spanish, the trade language. The Mayan tribal peoples each had their own distinct language and diet, and each individual clan within each tribe wore distinctive handwoven outfits. While the regional Mayan tribal peoples had a Latino Colonial veneer and many of the men spoke Spanish, there was an obvious need for separate Bibles and movements in each tribe based on their language and culture.

There are four pictures of people wearing typical Guatemalan Indian dress on pages 28 and 29. The first is a picture of a woman from the Atitlan region with yards of a colorful handwoven hair sash around her head making a type of brimmed hat (figure 1, page 28, left column). Her clothes are very distinct from the watercolor portrait of a Cakchiquel woman with the shawl hat and a very different woven

R. W. Lewis grew up in Guatemala, helped her parents start the US Center for World Mission, now Frontier Ventures, and with her husband, Tim, helped to found Frontiers. They have spent the last forty years working on behalf of blessing Muslim families.

blouse or huipil[2] (figure 2, top, right column). Then you have the watercolor of a Quiche (K'iche') woman with her elaborate tie-dyed skirt[3] (figure 3, bottom, right column). The Quiche were the original Mayan feudal lords and were very proud of their technique for tie-dying threads before weaving—a closely guarded secret. You could easily tell which tribe a person came from, male or female, by their tribal outfits.

In 1917 in Guatemala, a Mayan tribal person asked Cameron Townsend (later the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators), "If your God is so big, why can't he speak my language?" Up until that time, the Roman Catholic churches which had been there for over four centuries only conducted mass in the Latin language, and the Protestant churches started by evangelical missionaries who had arrived in the 19th century, only conducted services in Spanish. Townsend was shocked by this question. He realized that these Indian languages also mattered greatly to God, and that the lack of translations in Mayan languages might explain why there weren't movements to Christ going on in the Indian tribal areas.[4]

Figure 1. Woman from the Atitlan region: woven sashes around their heads making a brimmed hat.

By 1958, when my parents arrived in the Mam Indian tribal region of western Guatemala, the Presbyterian missionaries Dudley and Dorothy Peck had learned the Mam language and translated the entire New Testament. (Both had gone out as Student Volunteers for Mission. Dorothy was a Greek major from Wellesley College and her husband Dudley was

Figure 2. Cakchiquel woman with a shawl hat and a very different woven blouse or huipil.

Figure 3. Quiche (K'iche') woman in elaborate tie-dyed skirt.

a graduate of Williams.) Here they are in the picture wearing the traditional Mam Indian clothing (figure 4 below). Dorothy, her friend, and two Mam Indian girls are dressed in the dark blue skirts, vivid colorful blouses (*huipiles*), and wide black and white woven sashes worn as belts that were typical for women of that tribe.

Figure 4. Women in typical Mam Indian women's clothing: dark blue skirts, vivid colorful blouses (huipiles), and wide black and white woven sashes worn as belts.

My father, Dr. Ralph D. Winter, quickly realized that the Mam Indian pastors were being trained in Spanish in the seminary that was down on the coast. As a result, they were only planting Spanish-speaking churches in cities, avoiding the poverty of the rural Mam tribal areas. *The first insight gained from Guatemala was that when pastors from minority people groups are trained in a foreign or dominant culture, they rarely return. When they do, they use the dominant language and culture in the churches instead of the local language and culture.*

To change this pattern of dislocation, he helped start the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) movement so that the Mayan tribal pastors could be trained in their own villages and maintain their own familial livelihoods. Today there are scriptures and strong movements to Christ in virtually all the Mayan tribes of Central America.

The second insight from Guatemala was that without "people group eyes," the ones that are left out are usually the minority people groups, "hidden" in rural areas, mountains, deserts, and jungles—even urban jungles.

When Cameron Townsend started Wycliffe Bible Translators to ensure that his insight about language and the Scriptures went global, it led to a huge explosion in movements among minority people groups all around the world. People groups that hadn't been affected by Christian missions before were suddenly in view. Ralph Winter and Jim Emery started the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) movement which *enabled natural leaders to be trained as pastors within their own people groups, ensuring well-discipled movements in even remote groups.*

Insights from North Africa

We lived eight years in North Africa and had a team of forty adults working with three of the largest Muslim Berber tribal people groups. There are thirteen different large Berber tribes in North Africa each with their own distinct language, their own musical traditions, their own combination of spices, and their own crafts and rug designs. But Arabs had ruled them for the last 1300 years. It was people group thinking that revealed the plight of the Berbers to my husband and me when we decided to move there. It became apparent that these groups also had been overlooked by Bible translators who were restricted from working in "closed countries" without government permission. Even though there had been many Berber Christians before the Muslim Arab conquest (including St. Augustine whose mother Monica was Berber), in no century had there been Berber-language Bibles or sustained indigenous movements to Christ in any of the large Berber people groups. Thus, early Christian Berbers had assumed the Muslim religion of the Arab invaders, unlike the unyielding Armenians in Eastern Turkey who had their own Bible from early on. Arab invaders banned the alphabet of the Berber tribal peoples, and any trace of Berber Christianity was eventually erased except for some early Christian symbols like the fish and the cross still present in their hand-woven carpets or human tatoos. The recent movement to Christ among the Kabyle Berbers has also suffered severely, and they have only recently had a complete Bible in their own language.

Only in the last few years have Berber-language Bibles even begun to appear. The Rifi Berber tribal area where we lived for eight years finally completed their full Rifi Berber Bible just a few years ago. Now literacy is crucial, as are audio versions. Furthermore, there are very few Scriptures in the Moroccan Arabic language known as *Darija (derizha)*. Because Moroccan Arabic is not considered high class enough to qualify as a written Arabic language, no one is taught to read in the language they speak (like when people spoke French, Italian or Spanish, but the written language was still Latin). As a result, to this day I am aware of no indigenous movements among the Moroccan Arabs.

These observations led to the first insight gained from North Africa, which is that heart language scriptures and worship are key to developing resilient, self-sustaining, indigenous movements.

But these decades of failure yielded further insights. When we arrived in Morocco in 1981, there was only one church existing after one hundred years of pioneer outreach. There were elders for a small believing network across the entire country. When we moved to an inland city, within months we were able to gather up a fellowship of believers in our living room—sitting on Moroccan couches, complete with offerings for the poor. We noticed the Arabs would sit on one side of the room, and the Berbers would sit on the other side of the room. But, most importantly, we noticed that they didn't gather at all if we ourselves weren't there. After one hundred years of outreach to Moroccan Arabs, when we arrived fewer Arab believers remained in the country than the number of missionaries who had gone to reach them! So, without movements to Christ, single churches slowly die out.

This observation led to the second insight from North Africa, that *no people group becomes reached without a self-sustaining indigenous movement that spreads through whole families, pre-existing communities, or networks of trust.*

This insight was confirmed when we tried to get together a Rifi Berber church. This time we weren't trying to put Arabs and Berbers into the same group. We weren't even trying to put people from different Berber areas into the same group, because they would end up arguing about which Berber language was the correct one. We knew two believers from the Rifi Berber tribe, from distant Rifi villages. We assumed that if we introduced them to each other they would fall on each other's shoulders with big hugs at having found another Rifi Berber who was a believer. However, instead they barely talked to each other, barely looked at each other. Then we realized that there was long-standing distrust not only between the Berbers and the Arabs, but due perhaps to the surveillance of a totalitarian state and the secret police or perhaps to competition and enmity between feudal clans and chieftains, trust had eroded between groups and even between clans of the same Berber people group.

It's clear that *without trust in relationships, movements do not form.* Aggregate churches not only fail to start movements, but they also actually hurt families. What do I mean by an aggregate church? I mean churches where you bring unfamiliar people together, and you try to make them into a church—people who previously did not know each other. There's no trust relationship between them, so even if those believers might begin to trust each other and love each other, their families are often left out. They've been pulled individually out of their families, and their families frequently don't come to faith, because the families don't trust the other people that are in that new group. In addition,

the families now resent and fear the Christians for stealing their family members, like one would with some kind of cult. So *indigenous movements must spread through pre-existing trust networks to be self-sustaining.*
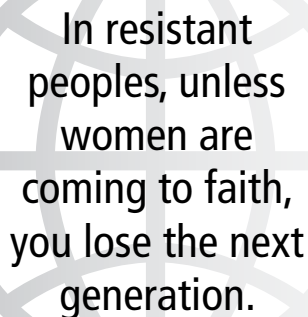
The third insight we discovered in North Africa is that *often the strongest leaders were those whose mothers had come to faith and had raised them as believers.* Again, family relationships were key in lasting movements, but the involvement of mothers was crucial.

We observed that in resistant peoples, unless women are coming to faith, you lose the next generation. I wrote an article about this insight in 2008,[5] documenting how the "Bible women" of Korea and China became the basis of the movements in those previously resistant areas, despite the low status of women in those cultures. Native Bible women, often widows, would go from village to village, training women in the Bible (written or oral), and as a result the sons of those women became the leaders of the movements to Christ in Korea and in China.

In resistant peoples, unless women are coming to faith, you lose the next generation.

Insights from India

We eventually moved to India because it was the second largest Muslim country in the world. We wanted to find out why India is the country with over 200 years of Protestant mission history but with relatively little progress of the gospel, except in a few specific areas. Some regions have been called "the graveyard of missionaries." Donald McGavran, who was a third-generation Indian expat, noticed that self-sustaining indigenous movements in India tended to expand within people groups and only crossed into other people groups through bicultural bridge people. These were his seminal insights from his analysis of the "Bridges of God" that led to the "Homogeneous Unit Principle."[6]

India is the quintessential multicultural, *non-melting* pot. The picture of marbles in jars (figure 5, page 31) can represent the multiple layers of high identity that exist in India. For example, marbles in the left-hand jar can represent the Sunni Muslim people groups—there are a lot of people groups inside that jar. The big black marble might represent the Kashmiri Sunni Muslims, who live in their own geographical area in the country, which would tend to make them easier to reach. The other colors represent other Sunni Muslim groups that are scattered all over different parts of India and who have a "dual high identity." One high identity is the language and people group that they are a part of, while their second high identity is that they are Sunni Muslims (which also is broken into multiple sub-groups, like the Deobandi branch or the Tablighi Jamaat movement).

Our first insight was that *India is a very complex situation of high identity people groups with multiple identities.* They have guarded their separate identities for many centuries, even thousands of years, though they frequently live side by side. They value their people group identity and do not succumb to a melting pot.

After three generations of his family living in India, Mc-Gavran was still an expat. I, too, have three grandchildren who were born in India. My son had to sign a document saying that they were never going to try to get Indian citizenship for their Indian-born daughter. This pattern is exactly the opposite of melting pot countries like the United States, where we offer citizenship to anybody born here, and we appreciate the inflow of many different people from many different places. While living in India, we observed that the Indian people groups have multiple layers of exclusive identities, that people groups with high identity are not necessarily homogeneous, either linguistically or generationally; however, that doesn't mean that movements don't follow along these people group lines.

Figure 5. Marbles in jars representing the multiple layers of high identity that exist in India.

For three thousand years India has resisted assimilation of cultures, or becoming a melting pot, and this continues even if these distinct peoples spread out globally. Just as the prophet Abraham sent for a wife for his son from his own people group, it is common for diaspora Indians to seek out their spouses from their own people group back in India—even if they no longer speak the same language. For example, in Calcutta there was a Tamil Muslim family we got to know, and they did not speak Urdu, Bengali, or any of the North Indian languages. They only spoke English and their Tamil from South India. The parents got wives for their sons from their Tamil Sunni people group from as far away as Singapore or Canada. A recent documentary-movie entitled, *Meet the Patels*, tells the story of families from the Patel

people group who have moved to other countries, how they meet each other, and how they get married. In the movie, the Patels have their own big giant telephone book-sized book of Patels from all over the world, so one can figure out who to marry (probably functions today through the internet).

In India itself, people's clothes reveal their religion, region and even often their caste status or people group. I had to carefully learn which style of clothes to wear to identify with a particular people group. But I did not realize this at first, so I just bought the clothing that I liked from the markets of Delhi. Then I found out later that my clothing identified me as being from Lucknow or from Jaipur or from Kashmir. Some clothes meant I was Hindu, or others that I was Sunni or Shi'a Muslim, even others identified me as a Sikh. Others literally shouted "tourist" because people in Delhi didn't wear those kinds of clothes. I couldn't just buy the clothes that I thought were the most beautiful. You'd think I would have learned this from growing up in Guatemala. I falsely expected a giant city to be a melting-pot rather than to have distinct people group lines visible even in the clothing.

A second insight we saw was that the churches in Delhi were multiethnic churches, but they were not multicultural—they were Christian melting pots. In other words, people came from all over India to Delhi and joined these churches. But the churches were fully English speaking and had a Western modern Christian culture. They would sing popular Western worship songs displayed on overhead screens. They would sit on plastic chairs. In no way did they represent the cultures of the different people groups that were in the church. The churches were a melting pot situation and so the Christianity represented there was what they had in common, which turned out to be an English, Western, modern Christian culture. It was multiethnic but monocultural, except at the potlucks when people brought food from their own backgrounds.

> We observed that Indian people groups have multiple layers of exclusive identities, which are not necessarily homogeneous, either linguistically or generationally.

A third insight that came from living in India was that today half of the largest Frontier People Groups in the world are in India, both by number of groups and by their population size. We were stunned not only by the huge number of Muslim people groups in India, but the huge number of untouched Hindu and other

groups. India, although a nation, is more like a continent, with nearly as many people as all of Africa. Africa has more than 2000 languages, but India has a similar number or more—according to the 2018 Indian census, India has more than 19,000 mother tongue dialects.[7] In 2013, the Ministry of Education in India launched the Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL), https://www.sppel.org/, to document the endangered languages of India, in an attempt to preserve them.[8] People groups are still highly important in India. This awareness has led to a new analysis of the least reached peoples of the world.

In 2018, a new demographic analysis sorted out these people groups with no progress of the gospel and called them "Frontier People Groups."[9] A Frontier People Group (FPG) is a subset of unreached people groups that has less than 0.1% Christians (1 out of 1000) and no known indigenous movements among them. Globally there are 293 "mega" Frontier People Groups that are over a million in size, and 155 of them live in India.[10] These nearly 300 mega FPGs have a combined population of 1.6 billion (80% of all the FPGs, and 20% of humanity). The total population within all the Frontier People Groups globally is about two billion, and over one billion, a little more than half, are in India.[11]

India's Frontier People Groups are virtually untouched by the churches of India, many of which are western-style churches. There are 600 million people in Other Backward Castes (OBCs) that are virtually untouched by the gospel. There are 200 million Muslims that are in Sunni groups, Shia groups, Sufi groups, and in other sects like the Deobandi and Barelvi. There is also an amazing global Sunni Muslim reform movement called the Tablighi Jamaat, which started in India around a hundred years ago. They now have over 100 million adherents globally in more than 150 countries.[12]

Besides the immense variety of Hindu castes there are also Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and tribals. Therefore, a town of 100,000 could have several dozen distinct unreached people groups in the same town, whose people don't intermarry and interact little.

Fourth, we realized that the vast majority of people groups in India are not concentrated in a distinct geographic area, and this pattern makes working with specific people groups significantly more difficult. People groups in most of the world are geographically concentrated, as are most of the people groups which have been reached in India—mountain tribes and other people groups outside the caste system. However, because the caste system is based on occupation or trades, most of the caste

people groups are distributed throughout virtually every town in all of India, identifying with one another even though they do not share the same language.

> **Half of the largest Frontier People Groups in the world are in India, both by number of groups and by population size.**

This distribution does not mean we can ignore the principle of working with people groups. The Sunni Tamil Muslim family in Calcutta I mentioned above has a higher commitment and connection to the other Sunni Tamil people groups all over the world than they do to the other Muslim peoples who live around them in Calcutta. The people groups living side-by-side rarely become close, and even in megacities they do not make friends with their neighbors but relate only through people group networks. Our Shia friends who lived in a Sunni neighborhood pretended to be Sunni most of the time, because they were afraid of what the people in their Sunni Muslim neighborhood would do to them if they found out that they were Shia Muslims. It is counterproductive to extract these people from their households and try to put them into Westernized, English-language churches like those formed by other Christianized Indian people groups in Delhi. Indian people groups need to understand, as did the Samaritan village that Jesus reached out to in John 4, that *Jesus is their savior, too, without having to leave their people group.*

Insights from North America

The contrast with life in North America also provided missiological insights about the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP). The US is a quintessential "melting pot" (see figure 6, page 33). Because of their history as immigrants wanting to leave their past behind, Americans resist and even oppose people group thinking, putting a high value on multiculturalism and idealizing melting pot culture. As a third culture kid who grew up speaking both Spanish and English, who then learned to speak various levels of Arabic, Berber, Hindi, and Urdu, I have learned to love the differences in language and culture. I love eating and dressing like my friends in the local culture, and they love helping me learn about their customs, their religions, their rituals, and their cuisine. In the cultural foment and confusion about the HUP, one can suspect my behavior: is it a cultural appreciation that honors the culture of others, or is it a more harmful cultural appropriation that dishonors the culture of others by adopting their ways?

In our re-entry to the US, we saw *a huge tension between wanting to erase distinctive people group identities and the basic human need to have some form of people group identity*. Needing a people group identity seems like a natural desire for all people, which has led some to ask the question: is the melting pot the best way to honor people from different backgrounds?

By comparison, India is truly multicultural, like marbles in a jar, which appears to encourage prejudice between people groups, even fear and violence. On the other hand, melting pots are not truly multicultural, compelling hybridity with the dominant culture, so while they eliminate some forms of prejudice, they can breed other forms which are just as virulent.

Figure 6. The US is a quintessential "melting pot."
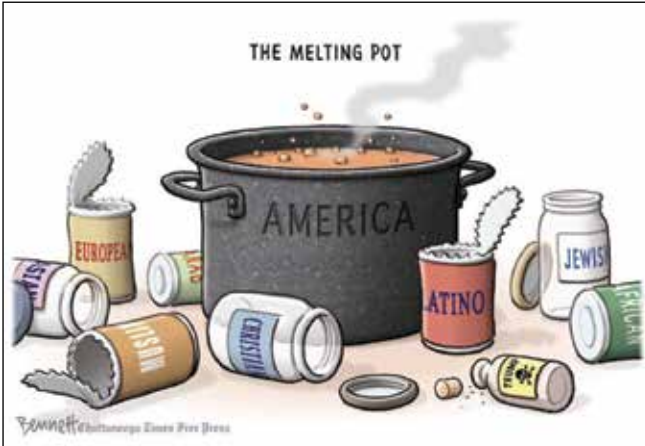
Some of the negative consequences of desiring a melting pot civilization, and therefore minimizing people group distinctions, can include things like: the sending of children of minority groups to local or boarding schools to assimilate them into the dominant culture (as happened in Native American tribes); intentionally fostering a loss of identity with the culture of origin (often with good intentions at the hands of the original immigrant parents); the loss of one's native tongue, food, and culture in a generation or two; and insuring that one's identification with the dominant culture erases one's old identity. A person or family's old identity is usually subsumed, and most minorities in America, native or immigrant, have eventually lost their original languages and cultures. If the immigrant or native minority is sufficiently large, they may become a bicultural people group—fluent in both languages, with an understanding of both cultural systems, but often not feeling completely at home in either. They're essentially a third culture.

Also, melting pot civilizations are often intolerant of opposing ideas and cultures. The classical example of a melting pot was Rome, where "when in Rome do as the Romans do." You weren't supposed to bring in your other non-Roman ideas and ways, but you were supposed to become like the Romans. Ethnically diverse situations can become monocultural. As in America, Rome granted Roman citizenship to people from hundreds of different ethnic backgrounds.[13] Even former slaves could eventually become Roman citizens.[14] However, those who became Roman citizens were expected to adopt the Roman language and culture, and to support the cultural and political imperialism of Rome. When the Catholic Church conformed to this Roman expectation by using the Roman language and forms, the Roman Catholic leadership exercised an "anti-homogeneous unit principle" approach to the gospel. For centuries, everyone had to learn Latin to read the Bible or any literature, to worship with the same Latin language liturgy, and to accept the Roman hierarchical form of leadership. (See figure 7 below.)

And what about *the crisis of mass immigration on melting pot civilizations?* Eventually Rome was overrun by other people groups to the extent that Italy lost its own native language. In the US, an astonishing number—some estimate as high as ten million people, counting those estimated as "got aways,"[15] from over 150 different nations—have come across the southern border in the past few years (2020 to 2024). This influx is undoubtedly one of the greatest migrations of human beings in history.[16]

Many Guatemalans have streamed across the US Southern border. Some studies say over eighty percent of the people from Central and Latin America coming into the country are Christians and twenty to thirty percent of those are evangelical Protestants.[17]

Figure 7. Characteristics of "multicultural" or melting pot civilizations.

Characteristics of "multicultural" or melting pot civilizations	
Loss of identity with culture of origin, often loss of language in a generation or two.	Intolerance of opposing ideas. Best ancient example of a melting pot was Rome. "When in Rome do as the Romans do."
New identity with dominant culture of the melting pot. Old identity either subsumed or 3rd culture.	Those who became Roman citizens were expected to adopt the language and culture and support the cultural and political imperialism of Rome.
Ethnically diverse, but monocultural. Like America, Rome gave Roman citizenship to people from hundreds of ethnic backgrounds, even former slaves.	The Roman Catholic church conformed to the Roman expectation: use our language and forms. The Roman Catholic leadership largely had an anti-HUP approach to the Gospel.

Pictures of the migrants show all the people dressed in Western clothes to fit into an American melting pot. Having grown up in an Indian tribe in Guatemala, I was sad to see that they were not only giving up their land, but they were giving up their tribal cultures, their languages, their tribal ways of dressing, and their heritage as native Mayan tribal peoples. I would venture to say, if they realized what they were losing, most immigrants would have preferred to be helped to thrive in their own homeland, with their own family members nearby, rather than give it all up to come to the land of promise. Most of these masses of people, half of them young men, are no longer fleeing looming starvation and famine, or drug cartel violence and murder (though most end up indebted indefinitely to the cartels who helped them cross illegally). They are fleeing persistent poverty and are hoping to get richer in their American Dream, unaware of what it's going to do to their own language, culture, and family heritage. The path to wealth is full of hurdles, including temptations to become permanent welfare cases thereby continuing their persistent poverty in the US.

> # The classical example of a melting pot was Rome—when in Rome do as the Romans do. . . . For centuries, everyone had to learn Latin to read the Bible.

Melting pot societies seem to destroy minority languages and cultures by the third generation. Some recommend replacing "melting pots" with a "salad bowl" form of multiculturalism, where each of the individual cultures represent distinct flavors. This plan is hard to accomplish, even at global meetings, like the UN, with simultaneous translations available through headphones—replicated in smaller ways in our global meetings of churches and agencies. In actual practice, if communities living together maintain their independent languages and cultures, it ends up with more like a "jar of marbles" than a salad bowl, like in India where the different people groups do not interact.

Is there something better than melting pots and salad bowls? Mohammed Berry comments,

> Food metaphors like the melting pot and the salad bowl theories have illustrated different approaches to integration by explaining the political and power dynamics between dominant and minority groups. By combining ethnic identities into homogeneous and/or multicultural outcomes, food metaphors empowered dominant ethnic groups. For refugees, this obscures their actual sociopolitical circumstances and embraces their harsh historical experiences.[18]

The principal difference between the melting pot and the salad bowl theory of civilizations is our ability to see with "people group eyes." But these people group eyes will result in true mutual respect only when rooted in a biblical view of humanity—that all peoples are created in God's image and are of equal value.

Is People Group Thinking Dangerous?

History gives witness to various forms of people group thinking around the world. All people groups everywhere have tended to be ethnocentric, believing their own group to be superior, and in some cases, the only true humans. While slavery was universal until the popes banned it in Europe and the New World,[19] it raised its head in Europe again during the colonial period, sparked by the industrial demand for workers on sugar, tobacco, and cotton plantations. Amazingly, after over 100 years of persevering work, and eventually a bloody civil war, British and then American evangelicals spearheaded a social uprising to put down both the slave trade and slave ownership, championing the equality of all humans before God.[20]

It happened just in time! The centuries-old practice of slavery just missed getting a huge boost from Darwin, who generated the "scientific" justification for an ethnocentrism based on racial theories of inequality. Within a decade after the American Civil War, Darwin's theory of evolution dealt both biblical truth and human equality a crushing blow, fueling white supremacy and eugenics as it spread globally through the late 1800s. It legitimized the false idea that there is not one human race, but different races, implying some races are "more evolved" than others. Eugenics, with its goal of breeding a better human species, was supported by the US Supreme Court in 1927 (Buck vs. Bell), when it upheld sterilizing humans who seemed unfit to be parents. This perspective was already being championed by socialist and Marxist groups in England and throughout Europe, eventually culminating in the genocidal ideology of the National Socialists of Germany (Nazis). Organizations like Planned Parenthood were explicitly founded to promote the limiting of births among those deemed less evolved.[21] Clearly, without a biblical grounding in the creation of man, people group distinctions can be twisted in a darker direction.

More specifically, people group focus can seem to support adversarial or hierarchical views of people group identity which emphasize animosity or revenge instead of biblical views of common humanity and the breaking down of walls of hostility. Darwinism and the caste system are not the only examples. More recently, Critical Race Theory tries to right some of these wrongs, focusing concern on the people who have been suppressed and condemned historically. While it champions justice for the oppressed, it does so without promoting reconciliation.[22] Ironically, CRT is resulting in a resurgence of racial animosity and segregation, building a new moral hierarchy based on race. (See figure 8, page 35)

So yes, it seems that focusing on people groups can have dangerous consequences. "People group eyes" alone cannot lead to the blessing of all peoples—those family groups *(ethne)* of the world which God promised to bless through Abraham 4000 years ago (Genesis 12:1–3). *Only in the context of God's love for all the peoples of the earth is blessing and healing fulfilled in people group relationships.*

Figure 8. Concepts in Critical Race Theory (CRT).
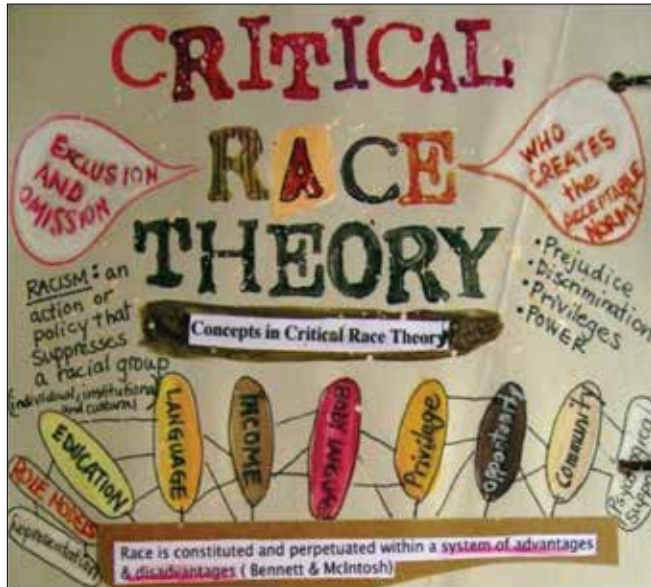
Insights from Scripture

So, what can we learn from Scripture? Is the goal of the gospel to bring blessing and peace through extinguishing or diminishing people groups? Should we welcome an increasingly global modern melting pot church culture? Or is the actual goal of the gospel to bless the people groups of the earth and to end hostilities between them? In Ephesians, Paul says:

> But now in Jesus Christ you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for He, himself, is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. By abolishing the law of commandments expressing ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near for through him we have equal access in one Spirit to the Father. (Eph. 2:13–18)

One might assume from these verses that the goal is a melting pot, one new man, who emerges after the hostilities have been broken down. But is that what we see Jesus doing? Is that what we see God doing down through history? Not only does Scripture uphold the truth that God has created all people equal and that his desire is to bless all the peoples of the earth,

it reveals that Jesus is our peace—bringing harmony, not hostility, unity without uniformity. Whether people groups are distinct, mixed, hybrid or melting pots, he loves them all.

The fundamental insight is that God blesses all the people groups of the earth by breaking down the walls of hostility between them. In him they become brothers and sisters in Christ. He does not do that by breaking down ethnofamilial identities, for he has promised that people from every tribe, tongue, and people group will be praising him before his throne (Rev. 5:8–14).

Secondly, God also keeps family lines and people groups with their own identities. Abraham's descendants, for example, spent four hundred years in Egypt, but God still organized them by family lines and by tribes when they came out of Egypt after four hundred years and settled into the Promised Land. In Genesis 10 through 11, we see him enumerating all the families of the earth that he's going to bless. And Jesus let the Samaritans be Samaritans (John 4), encouraging them to be worshippers in spirit and truth, and not requiring them to go up to Jerusalem to worship. Again, in Revelation, people from every tribe, tongue, and ethne are in God's Kingdom.

Thirdly, the New Testament describes distinct movements to Christ in distinct people groups. The Jewish people refused to melt into the Roman pot; but, conversely, the Judaizers thought believing Gentiles should become like Jews, which the Scriptures make clear would have undermined the very essence of the gospel. Instead, Paul told the Galatians that being circumcised or not is unimportant; what counts is a new creation and faith expressing itself in love (Galatians 5:6, 6:15). In the Bible, the Jewish movement to Christ is called "The Way." There were also distinct Samaritan movements to Christ. And believers were first called "Christians" in the city of Antioch—a melting pot city of all different kinds of Gentiles and diaspora Jews.

Insights from Church History

Throughout the history of Christianity, there are also insights relevant to the Homogeneous Unit Principle. When studying the diffusion of the gospel, it appears that *each completely distinct people group needs its own indigenous movement—that movements to Christ predominantly follow people group lines* (including even melting pot peoples). And secondly, *indigenous church structures, that fit the culture appropriately, best develop after a movement has been growing for some time.*

Within the Roman sphere, the movements to Christ among Jews, Samaritans, Greeks, and Romans all had their own unique characteristics and languages.[23] *And as the Christian movement spread out from the Roman regions, movements to Christ resisted the Roman multiethnic melting pot idea and spread along people group lines.* Some enduring examples are the MarThoma churches in India, the Armenians, and the Ethiopians.[24]

The Celtic and Irish people managed to have their own movement to Christ that lasted two hundred years before they were forced back into the Latin melting pot. The Nestorians (the Syriac-speaking Church of the East) freed the Persian believers from Roman authority. The Greek Orthodox churches broke away because they preferred their Greek language over Latin, and their own traditions and calendars. Later, the Germanic and Northern European peoples rejected Roman dominance during the Protestant Reformation, desiring indigenous translation of the Scriptures and self-governing of their own faith and churches.

Likewise, history makes clear that *Protestant mission movements have moved forward by language and people groups around the world.* Even in today's American megacities, distinct congregations of immigrants thrive (Vietnamese, Chinese, Iranian, Central American, East African, Russian, etc.). Once the children and grandchildren have lost their languages and cultures of origin, they often prefer to join multiethnic churches within the dominant American language and culture.

History also reveals that *the more Christian leaders have tried to force distinct peoples into a single language, structure, or "Christian" culture, the greater the animosity that develops between different branches of Christianity.* To the contrary, it creates peace when we allow everyone to thrive in their own culture, to read Bibles in their own language, and not be forced into the same melting pot church culture.

Indigenous church structures can develop appropriately if organic movements to Christ come first. In each culture, movements to Christ soon became organized in a way that reflects the indigenous patterns of the people groups involved—unless others were imposed from outside. For example, the initial church structures seem to be modeled on the synagogue structures that were prevalent in the Jewish communities around the Roman Empire—where heads of families were the elders in the synagogue. Later, when the movement to Christ had reached close to thirty percent of the Roman population, Constantine legalized Christianity in addition to paganism (313 AD) and Theodosius I made it the only legal religion (380 AD). The Roman Catholic church then took on the form of the Roman political structure with each diocese governed by a bishop—an indigenous structure familiar to both the Roman people and their civil leaders. In Ireland, the movement to Christ took on a more tribal structure for succession, where the sons of their chiefs, lords, or kings became Celtic monks and governed the faithful in areas controlled by their families.

Homogeneity, Identity, and Movements

In conclusion, movements to Christ have historically flowed along people group lines, even when the people groups belonged to a multiethnic, multicultural civilization. People groups of high identity usually follow family lines but aren't necessarily homogeneous. Many people belong to more than one identity group, which means they could become a follower of Jesus in either one or another identity group. Bicultural people can bridge the gospel into new people groups. Paul was able to win Roman people to the Lord, as a Roman citizen, more easily than someone who, like James, was completely within the Jewish branch of believers in Christ.

Dominant people groups, not minorities marginalized within their societies, are the most invested in having everybody leave his or her own culture and join their melting pot. But people like to belong to distinct identity groups, and these are most stable when they are multi-generational family-based people groups, not ones based simply on ideology or interest.

Is the goal of the gospel to bring blessing and peace through extinguishing people groups? Should we welcome an increasingly global modern melting pot church culture?

In the West, we like the idea of all the people in our churches being from a variety of different backgrounds. Our openness makes us feel good, that we're giving them the respect due them. We'll occasionally sing a song in Spanish, or any another language represented among those attending our churches, but really *the people groups who feel the most suppressed in multi-cultural or multi-ethnic fellowships are the minority people groups.* To survive in those fellowships, they are forced to assume the culture of the dominant people group—more often a western globalized culture. It does not respect them in the way that we assume it is.

By emphasizing the Frontier People Groups—those who have no indigenous movements to Christ and virtually no believers in their own group who can lead them to Christ [25]—we can make sure that no people group is left out of the Kingdom, and that the Kingdom fully expresses the beauty of each separate culture and language.

These insights show the Homogeneous Unit Principle to be fundamental to human nature and God's way of blessing the families of the earth. Movements to Christ within people groups can bring peace between groups—reconciliation rather than retribution, harmony without homogeneity, and unity without uniformity.
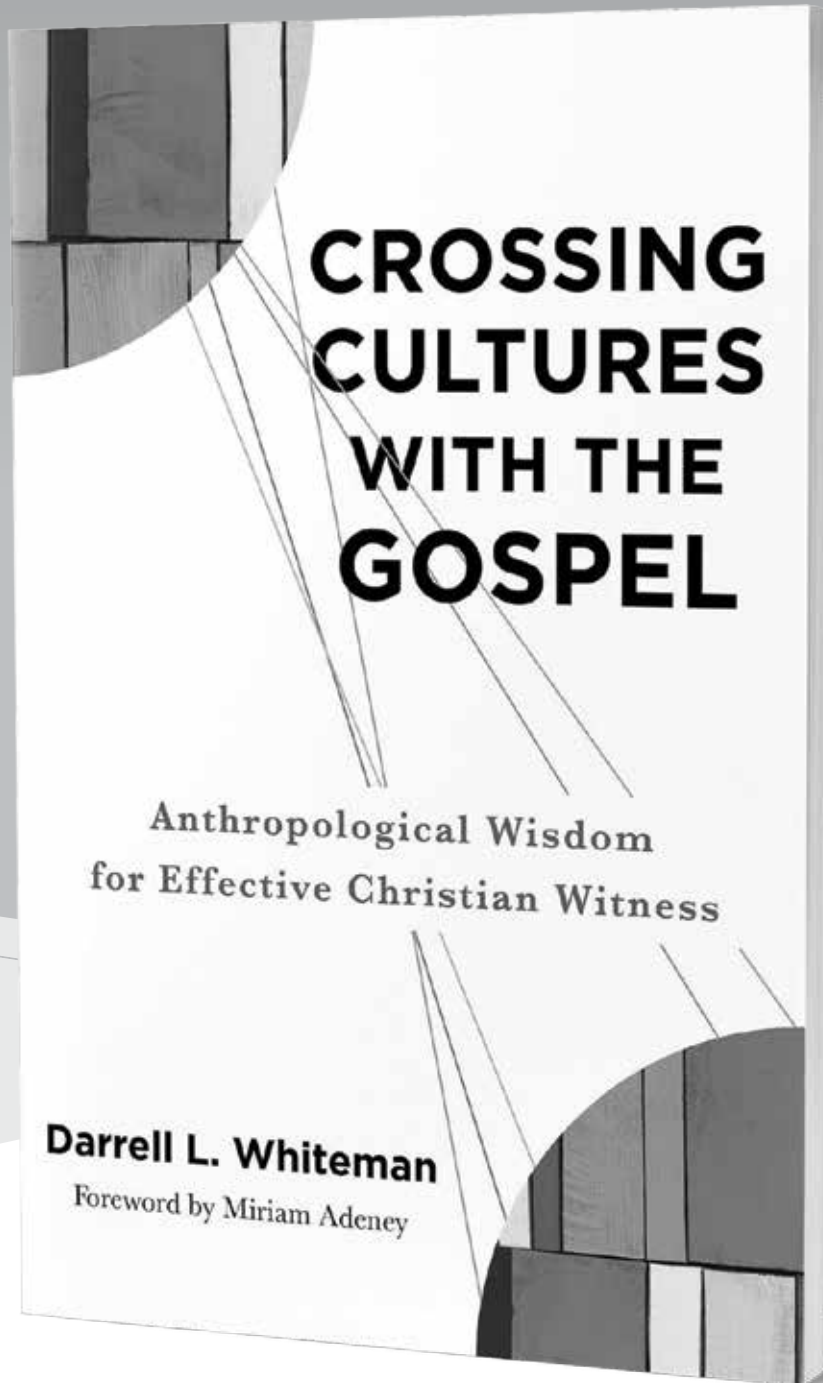
Thank you very much for this chance to reflect with you on this crucial principle. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] For emphasis and clarity certain of these insights will be italicized throughout the text.

[2] Carmen L. Pettersen, *The Maya of Guatemala: Life and Dress* (Ixchel Textile Museum Publishers, Guatemala City), 183.

[3] Pettersen, *The Maya of Guatemala,* 69.

[4] Townsend spent the following decade learning and translating the Bible into one of the Mayan languages. In the 1930s he established Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) to train others to do what he had done among the thousands of other forgotten tribal people groups. They even set up a "jungle camp" to train workers how to survive in isolated jungle tribes. His insights led to the third era of Protestant missions, which focused on the people groups that had previously been overlooked.

[5] R. J. Lewis, "Underground Church Planting Movements: The Surprising Role of Women's Networks," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 145–150.

[6] Donald A. McGavran, *Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005; reprint of 1955).

[7] "More Than 19500 Mother Tongue Languages Spoken in India: Census," *The Indian Express,* July 1, 2018, accessed April 18, 2024, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/more-than-19500-mother-tongues-spoken-in-india-census-5241056/.

[8] Agnee Ghosh, "The Race to Find India's Hidden Languages," *BBC International,* October 1, 2021, accessed April 18, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20211014-the-man-who-found-indias-hidden-languages.

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[10] "Frontier Peoples: Interactive," accessed April 18, 2024, https://joshuaproject.net/frontier/interactive.

[11] "Frontier Unreached Peoples," accessed April 18, 2024, https://joshuaproject.net/frontier.

[12] This site says 100 million plus: "Tablighi Jamaat: 100 Years of Da'wa and Reviving the Ummah," accessed April 18, 2024, https://tablighi-jamaat.com/en/home/. And this article says 150 countries: "Muslim Networks and Movements in Western Europe: Tablighi Jama'at," Pew Research Center, accessed April 18, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2010/09/15/muslim-networks-and-movements-in-western-europe-tablighi-jamaat/.

[13] Douglas Boin, "Ancient Rome Thrived When the Empire Welcomed Immigrants," *TIME,* June 9, 2020, https://time.com/5850622/rome-immigrants/.

[14] "The Roman Empire in the First Century: Slaves and Freemen," *PBS,* https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/slaves_freemen.html.

[15] "Senator Tom Cotton, Immigration Reform, and the RAISE Act," interview by Peter Robinson, *Uncommon Knowledge,* Hoover Institution, March 9, 2017, https://www.hoover.org/research/senator-tom-cotton-immigration-reform-and-raise-act.

[16] Kurt Christopher, "Forced Out: The Ten Largest Migrations in Human History," History Collection, August 23, 2017, https://historycollection.com/ten-largest-forced-migrations-human-history/#1-the-african-slave-trade-at-least-12-000-000-people-displaced.

[17] "Most Undocumented Immigrants Are Christians From Latin America and Caribbean," The Christian Post, May 20, 2013, https://www.christianpost.com/news/most-illegal-immigrants-are-christians-from-latin-america-and-caribbean.html.

[18] Mohammed Berry, "A Critical Literary Review of the Melting Pot and Salad Bowl Assimilation and Integration Theories," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 142–151.

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–CRAIG OTT, TEDS (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

CROSSING
CULTURES
WITH THE
GOSPEL

Anthropological Wisdom
for Effective Christian Witness

Darrell L. Whiteman
Foreword by Miriam Adeney

Revisiting the Homogeneous Unit Principle

The Church:
An Intercultural Poem

by Ruth Padilla DeBorst

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The Poem of God

I tried to write
the best poem,
but you had already done so,
Lord.

I tried to find
the best word,
but you are
the best Word
by far.

We are your poem,
written with pain
and blood
of your Son
of your very heart.

The world is your
childbirth of words;
we are the syllables
of your Great Song.

(by Dominican, César Abreu-Volmar)

"For we are God's poem, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." These are familiar words we find in Ephesians 2:10.

A poem. What makes a poem a poem? Artistry, beauty, the blending or clashing of diverse evocative images, the multiple meanings behind the words, the varied emotions awakened by the words. And the source: the creator, the maker, the artist, the one who fashions the few or the many words, the disparate parts, into a cohesive work of art. In this text of Ephesians Bible translators have rendered the original "poiema" alternately as "work," "handiwork," "workmanship," terms which point to the creative act but lose the evocative power of "poem."

An Appointment I Could Not Miss

This paper, entitled, "The Church: An Intercultural Poem," was sparked by the invitation to contribute to the conversation on *Homogeneity and Hybridity: Revisiting the Homogeneous Unit Principle* for the 2022 Ralph Winter Lectureship. This was an appointment I could not miss. Allow me first to share the story behind my acceptance which plunged me head on into the topic that had brought us together during those days. After that, I will offer an explanation of what I mean by the church being—or called to be—an intercultural poem.

A 41-year-old, dark skinned Latin American stood on the stage of the Lausanne 1974 Congress on World Evangelization. He did not mince words when he addressed the global audience in Spanish, although he was fluent in English. He confronted head on the uncritical assimilation of US-American pragmatism in church and mission:

> When the church lets itself be squeezed into the mold of the world, it loses the capacity to see and, even more, to denounce, the social evils in its own situation. Like the colorblind person who is able to distinguish certain colors but not others, the worldly church recognizes the personal vices traditionally condemned within its ranks but is unable to see the evil features of its surrounding culture. In my understanding, this is the only way one can explain, for example, how it is possible for American culture Christianity to integrate racial and class segregation into its strategy for world evangelization.[1]

He criticized the homogeneous unit principle of the church growth movement as one captive to US-American culture, driven by technology and unfaithful to the radical and transformational ethical demands of the gospel.

> The Gospel of culture-Christianity today is a message of conformism, a message that, if not accepted, can at least be easily tolerated because it doesn't disturb anybody. The racist can continue to be a racist, the exploiter can continue to be an exploiter, Christianity will be something that runs along life, but will not cut through it.[2]

His was a call for a more "biblical gospel and a more faithful church," one that was delivered from "anything and everything in its culture that would prevent it from being faithful to the Lord in the fulfilment of its mission within and beyond its own culture."[3] His was not a wholesale rejection of culture but an acute warning against the uncritical absorption of all its values without holding them up against the values of God's kingdom and God's justice as laid out in Scripture, incarnated by Jesus Christ, and revealed by the Holy Spirit.

And how did he propose stepping beyond the bounds of the worldly ideologies imbedded in particular cultures, and the blind spots inherent to them? He called for humility, for a theological renewal in submission to the Lordship of Christ

and nourished by Scripture, and, finally, for unity in the church globally, a renunciation of ethnocentrism, and a constant search for theological cross-fertilization.

Three years later, this very same Ecuadorean contributed to the Pasadena Consultation on the Homogeneous Unit Principle. About his involvement, John Stott, who was moderating the Consultation, wrote:

> I was surprised how threatened the School of World Mission team obviously felt and, in consequence, how defensive they were in their presentations and contributions. I did not feel they were really "open," and it saddened me that when René Padilla got up to speak, they (quite unconsciously, no doubt) put down their pads and pens, folded their arms, sat back and appeared to pull down the shutter of their minds.[4]

The Fuller group that hosted the consultation rather obviously constituted a homogeneous unit in itself: middle-aged, white, middle-class academics and mission practitioners of US-American families who shared a passion for evangelism and church growth. Might their apparent disregard for what this radical Latin American had to say have been at all related to his outsider status, to the color of his skin, to his less-than-perfect pronunciation of the English language? One must wonder.

> Like the colorblind person who is able to distinguish certain colors, the worldly church recognizes the personal vices traditionally condemned within its ranks but is unable to see the evil features of its surrounding culture. —Padilla

A Radical Latin American's Resistance to the HUP
A Concrete Lived Experience

Now, you might have caught the name of this "outsider," who on both occasions and many others confronted the *status quo* of the evangelical establishment of his day. Yes: it was René Padilla, my father, who used to share openly around our dinner table the struggles he was experiencing on the global evangelical scene. And I, as an inquisitive teenager, not only soaked in the stories of controversies but also critically evaluated how consistent my parents' life was with their teaching and speaking. Happily, for my own faith journey, both matched up! Beyond his provocative call at Lausanne '74 and Pasadena '77, René and Cathy Padilla's life and ministry were dedicated to working out the radical implications of the

gospel in relation to the ethical challenges of the day, constantly parsing out the contextual cultural pulls and tugs that threatened the whole life commitment of the church to God's kingdom and God's justice.

> When dozens of young people, most of them addicted to drugs, suddenly flooded in, the decision was taken to be radically hospitable, even if that meant that purses might be pilfered.

What did the church René pastored look like on the ground in Buenos Aires, Argentina? Two cross-cultural encounters had awakened a rather traditional, homogeneous, middle-class congregation into full-fledged discipleship. First, members had learned to step over class barriers when the youth of the church had begun befriending children in a slum, offering after-school support and including them and their parents in regular church life. Second, the small Baptist church was converted to the fullness of the gospel when dozens of young people, most of them addicted to drugs, suddenly flooded in. In a congregational meeting, not without much debate, the decision was taken to be radically hospitable to the young people, even if that meant that purses might be pilfered. Two families left, out of fear that the "outsiders" would be a bad influence on their teenagers. The rest of us remained, and friendship with peers struggling to free themselves from addiction became the best antidote to drug use we could possibly have had![5] Poor and middle class, street dwellers and career people, illiterate and highly educated people, local people, and immigrants: regular church services became a colorful and variegated picture. Was it easy? Definitely not. Was life instantly harmonious? Clearly not. But it was precisely the openness to the creative work of the Spirit in the midst of difference and to the reconciling work of the Lord we were all seeking to follow that created a richly diverse community which attracted people and allowed the church to burst out of its original building and plant two new congregations. This concrete lived experience was one of three sources of René Padilla's consistent resistance to the homogeneous unit principle.

IFES Involvement

Another source was his engagement as a staff member of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, an organization composed of women and men of very distinct cultures and professional fields unified by their commitment to follow and witness to Jesus in the university world. The cross-fertilization and mutual challenge, only possible because of their differences, deepened their understanding of what it means to be a Christian community centered not on their particularities but on the Lordship of Christ and so to be fashioned by the Spirit into a welcoming fellowship to people of diverse social and cultural backgrounds without any one of them losing their identity nor taking precedence over the others.

Understanding of Scripture

The third source for Padilla's resistance to the HU principle and, actually, the first in importance, was Scripture. He conceded that, as McGavran stated, "It may be true that men like to become Christians without crossing racial linguistic or class barriers."[6] But he judged such preference as "irrelevant" in light of biblical teaching. He cited many New Testament passages that reveal the teaching and practice of the early church as grounds for his claim that:

> Membership in the body of Christ is not a question of likes or dislikes, but a question of incorporation into a new humanity under the lordship of Christ. Whether a person likes it or not the same act that reconciles him to God simultaneously introduces him into a community where people find their identity in Jesus Christ rather than in their age, culture, social class or sex and are consequently reconciled to one another.[7]

In Padilla's view, the church is that community which visibly embodies that reconciliation, and this is at the core of the good news of God's reign. For him, in the NT church,

> The breaking down of the barriers that separate people in the world was regarded as an essential aspect of the Gospel, not merely as a result of it. Evangelism would therefore involve a call to be incorporated into a new humanity that included all kinds of people.[8]

Padilla was not alone in his critique of the HU principle in the '77 Pasadena Consultation. Other "outsiders" to the Fuller group concurred with him. Mennonite anthropologist, Robert Ramsayer referred to the Ephesians 2 text:

> Aside from the question of what human beings like to do, the teaching on what happens when people become Christians is quite clear. In the second chapter of Ephesians where Paul speaks of the relations between Christians of Jewish background and Christians of Gentile background, he states clearly that neither is expected to join the group of the other, but instead Christ has formed one new people out of what were formerly two (verse 15).[9]

Mennonite ethicist John Howard Yoder posed the question of "whether the Gospel is the Gospel if it is deprived of its moral dimension."[10] He further elaborated:

> According to the witness of Luke in Acts, and that of Paul in Ephesians . . . it is the fundamental definition—and by

no means merely one accessory definition or a derivative description—of the Gospel that it creates one new humanity where previously there had been two hostile social communities.[11]

For these men, biblically grounded ethics demanded the crossing of barriers and trumped personal preferences and comfort.

The Significance of this Debate Today

Now, here we are, wars raging in Gaza, Ukraine, Myanmar, Yemen, Ethiopia, and the DRC, among other places. We must ask: What is the significance today of this debate from forty-five years ago? Why draw up this historical survey of the contestations surrounding the HUP now? I believe the issue is even more crucial in our current reality than it was in the 70s. The social, political, and religious landscape is profoundly polarized in the US and around the world. Positions and practices surrounding race, gender, climate change, migration, personal freedom, social responsibility, even COVID mask use, all are being weaponized. People are lining up, by choice or by force, in extremes and building higher walls and deeper trenches. Christians are not immune but, instead, often seem to be fueling the flames of animosity and justifying their positions theologically. In this scene, the Pauline description of the church as an intercultural poem is prophetically relevant.

> Christian mission involves inviting people to embark on a journey of radical discipleship in which every loyalty is put into question next to the loyalty owed to the one and only Lord Jesus.

The inhabitants of Asia Minor, recipients of the letter we know as Ephesians, could hardly have been any more diverse. Original Anatolians had been joined through war, trade, and forced migration by Persians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, and Jews. A mix of these, gathered in household churches, received the Pauline letter with the following teaching. Though the inheritors of Abraham, "the wandering Aramean," might have preferred to keep comfortably to themselves, isolating from their Gentile neighbors, the mystery revealed by Jesus Christ is that by his reconciling life and ministry, they are brought together into one body (Eph. 3:6). By his peace being, peace-making, and peace proclaiming, Jesus broke the

dividing wall of hostility between people groups. And it is not in any temple but in the new humanity, woven together from different ethnic and cultural strands, that God chooses to live by the Spirit (Eph. 2:22).

Was this coming together easy for the early believers? Definitely not. The Empire of the day would rather keep people apart from one another, each in their proper corner so that they could not join forces and subvert its precarious *Pax Romana.* The Temple would rather maintain the ethnic purity and allegiance of the Jewish people. The Greco-Roman temples would rather maintain the ethnic-cultural hold on Gentiles for their business loyalty. But God's intervention in history breaks those holds and inaugurates a new community, marked not by ethnic, racial, or class loyalties but by submission to a new Lord and by the unity of the Spirit. A deep dive into the greetings of Paul to different sets of house churches spread across the Roman Empire reveals the diversity in that new community. See, for example, Romans 16, where Roman, Greek, and Jewish names of free people mingle with those of slaves and freed slaves, men, and women.

Radical Discipleship: Where Every Other Loyalty is Called into Question

Was life as a diverse community instantly harmonious? Clearly not. Patterns of prejudice, classism, hierarchy, exclusion, and racism are hard to break, and the book of Acts and the various NT epistles give evidence of the struggles of the early communities of the Way in that regard and seek to nourish alternative postures and actions. It is striking, in that context, that, although the Gospel of Matthew was written to strengthen the identity of Jewish Christians after the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem, in the first chapter the author breaks with tradition to include in Jesus' genealogy four women who are foreigners, two Canaanites, Tamar and Rahab, a Moabite, Ruth, and a Hittite, Bathsheba. I can only imagine that such a daring move could have been a barrier for many a Jewish person to accept Jesus as the Messiah! Why, then, would Matthew include that information if not to challenge the comfortable homogeneity of the Jewish majority? The same Gospel account ends with Jesus' reaffirmation of his ultimate authority and his call that his followers make disciples, other followers, who will be brought from many nations, through teaching and baptism, into the new community that embodies the integration evident in Jesus' own genealogy. I believe we, as well as the scattered Jews and the Gentile newcomers, need to understand that Christian mission is not simply about ushering people across the line between non-faith and faith, but instead it involves inviting them, from the very beginning, to embark on a journey of radical discipleship in which every loyalty is put into question next to the loyalty

owed to the one and only Lord Jesus. And this highest allegiance is made visible in the nature of values, commitments, and actions in the world as well as in all relationships, and particularly ones with those who are different.

The Faith Community: An Intercultural Poem

I propose that the faith community today, as in those days, is called to live as an intercultural poem. What do we mean by intercultural? In contrast to "cross-cultural," which focuses on the barriers overcome, or "multi-cultural," which simply stresses the coexistence of diversity, the term "intercultural" points to the interstices, the places between different actors. An intercultural posture recognizes the natural hybridity of culture, ethnic, religious, and social identities and seeks to detect the points of intersection as a means to move beyond discrimination, stigmatization, racism, sexism and classism. In this stance, situatedness and power-relations are acknowledged, negotiated, and transformed. It is this liminal space, the one between people who are different, that requires nurture in our broken world if, as a church, we are to be part of the solution to so much divisiveness rather than part of the problem.

In Pauline words: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). It is only God's Spirit who makes unity possible in the midst of the many differences that threaten to keep us apart. God's Spirit breathes Christ's reconciliation into everyday relationships. It was God's Spirit who enabled the first disciples to communicate across language barriers at Pentecost. It was God's Spirit who opened the hearts of middle-class professionals to the poorer drug dependent young people in my local church in Buenos Aires and wove a body out of this heterogeneous mix. Our church did not simply become the sum of people sitting next to each other for a Sunday service but an intercultural community in which all members were converted into deeper understanding of God's love and claim on our lives.

It is also God's Spirit who is at work in Casa Adobe, the intentional Christian community my husband and I are a part of in Costa Rica. Members of our community differ in culture and nationality—we are Argentine, Venezuelan, US-American and Costa Rican. We differ in church tradition—we are Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal. We differ in socioeconomic status—we are refugees, political asylees, and middle-class professionals. Yet, we live as one faith community, sharing everything from morning prayer to dirty dishes, from a common purse and shared property to Sunday worship, neighborhood organizing and riverside reforestation.

Imagining and nurturing local congregations as embodied intercultural poems does not by any means entail melting particularities into one pot or creating what McGavran dismissively called "mongrel congregations." It may make realistic, common sense, to use McGavran's words, that people prefer becoming Christians with people like them. But the church is not a social club, or a bubble of likeness tailored to the preferences of its clients. If we believe that God does make all things new, that as followers of Jesus Christ we share in his resurrection power and that God's Spirit is active today, we cannot be tied to the sort of realism that reifies the *status quo* as the end of the story. We can step against the grain of our self-seeking, sectarian society and affirm that Christian communities, as poems, are all the richer when fashioned out of different colors, tastes, textures, and rhythms. Along with Padilla we can declare, in word and deed, that:

> The missiology that the Church needs today is not one that conceives the people of God as a quotation taken from the surrounding society but one that conceives it as "an embodied question mark" that challenges the values of the world.[12]

Christ's church is called to be the living, breathing, loving intercultural poem, beautiful in its diversity, evocative in its embodied witness of God's wide embrace, subversive in its confrontation of all exclusionary powers.

The church, as an intercultural poem, dances to a tune other than the dominant one. Created in God's image and redeemed from death by the Community-of-Love, Christ's church is called to be the living, breathing, loving intercultural poem, beautiful in its diversity, evocative in its embodied witness of God's wide embrace, subversive in its confrontation of all exclusionary powers. The church as an intercultural poem is empowered, built up, and diversely gifted by the Holy Spirit, a new and unlikely community of equals, with interdependent relationships of mutual respect within, and service far beyond itself. Embodying God's mission, bending borders and prophetically challenging humanly constructed walls, prejudices, and exclusions does demand sacrifice. But for followers of Jesus, the crucified, risen, and reigning Son of God and son of Jewish men and women from many nations, there is no other Way. **IJFM**

Endnotes

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The Homogeneous Unit Principle:
Probed by the Parts, Sold by a Synonym

by George G. Hunter III

Within the mission community and beyond, the principle of the "Homogeneous Unit" (HU) has probably been sworn by and sworn at, cussed and discussed, more than any other idea in missiological thought. When the principle first gained wider visibility, proponents of several views were so intense that I thought the idea deserved some humor attached; so, I conceived a joke. You have to tell it on someone, so I will tell it on my friend, Alan McMahan.

When Alan was born, his birth was attended by five doctors. The first doctor said, "I don't know what it is." The second said, "Well, it is some sort of organism;" the third pronounced it "a humanoid organism;" the fourth said that the baby was a "male humanoid organism." The fifth was not an MD, but a PhD—Dr. Donald McGavran, who pronounced young Alan to be "the first known member of a previously unclassified homogeneous unit!"

Homogeneous Unit Principle: We Have a Problem

With the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP), we have endured a problem. Here is one way to identify the source of the problem. As we teach in Communication Theory 101, many words (and symbols) have denotations *and* connotations. Denotation refers to the original meaning that the speaker or writer had in mind. Connotation refers to a meaning that the message's receivers, from their experience, might *attach* to the symbol. Typically, they assume that the meaning they attached IS what the symbol means. So, when the term "homogeneous units" penetrated the cultural prism through which many people filtered the message, they thought they saw "racism."

Let's recall the era in which Donald McGavran's school of thought emerged. The Cold War was still much with us and the Civil Rights movement had momentum. I knew people who suspected a "Communist" behind every tree. Others sensed "Racism" almost everywhere; their reaction to "homogeneous unit" connoted racism; the theory, they said, excused racial segregation. Many academics did

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what academics are supposed to do—they did their homework and found out what McGavran meant by the term, its denotation. Alas, some did not; they ran with what the idea connoted to them, and their polemics curried favor with Civil Rights people.

I first discovered that the term must be vulnerable to connotation-attachment when, in classes and in field speaking, I would teach Missiology's principle of Indigenous Christianity—which is virtually the HUP's Siamese twin. Everyone seemed to understand and affirm it (at least for the moment), without ever sniffing racism.

A Search for a Synonym without as much Baggage

So, I explored other fields of knowledge for a synonym. I discovered that McGavran's idea was widely perceived, usually as obvious. What other terms might be in play? Our scriptures often refer to "tribes" but that may not apply as widely today; and the Bible's "nations" does not refer to nation-states. The Diffusion of Innovations field reported that innovations spread between people who are "homophilous" that would carry similar baggage. Anthropologists spoke of macrocultures, cultures, subcultures, microcultures, and countercultures, but no one term seemed sufficient. In some fields, terms were clumsy—like "cohort populations." The denotation of "markets" was promising but carried its own connotative issues. The Intercultural Communication people spoke of "reference groups." Missiologists spoke of "people groups" and "people units"; the terms seldom leaked beyond our circles.

Then, when I read political science people referring to "affinity groups," I cheered. That term has now spread widely, and the social reality that this term (and the others) refers to is recognized as obvious and natural; indeed, people have formed into affinity groups since before recorded time.

My own understanding of this social reality has not been substantially influenced by these other fields because, at least for our purposes, the writings of McGavran, Tippett, Wagner, Winter, and others take us deeper. For years, whenever I have spoken of affinity groups, I have never been tarred and feathered. The term seems to communicate and, once explained, the idea usually resonates with what people have observed and experienced.

Dr. McGavran saw the world as a beautiful mosaic of different homogeneous units. He cogently extemporized the HU principle in contrasting ways at different times, in different settings. He is best known for this version: *People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.*

> Their reaction to "homogeneous unit" connoted racism; the theory, they said, excused racial segregation.

Dr. McGavran and I had several lengthy conversions on this topic. I especially recall two exchanges. Once, I asked him if people more easily become Christians without crossing a *cultural* barrier. He agreed. He said that he sometimes included the term in his definition and that it was the theory's most obvious connection to the principle of indigenous churches.

Another time, I suggested that, unlike the other types, a racial barrier is not nearly universal; Russia, China, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa might be large-region examples. Might the term "ethnic" be preferable? Without quite concurring, he saw some sense in the suggestion, and encouraged the use of that term if I found it more useful.

Discussions within the Missiology community reached something like this consensual explanation: HU refers to any group of people with one or more characteristics in common that influence their sense of identity, and their communication, choices, lives, worldview, and how they live. The theme of *identity* is essential in understanding the HU theory. By that criterion, we can understand why Meru people in Kenya, deaf people in Chicago, and drug addicts in Hong Kong connect in conscious affinity groups; people with red hair, Purdue graduates, and Buick drivers do not.
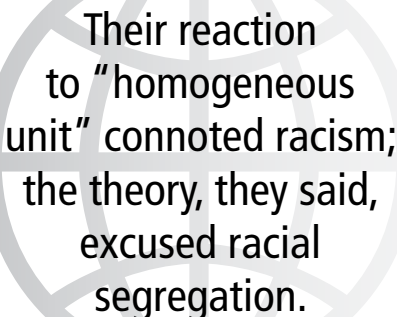
Unpacking Identity in Affinity Groups

Let me propose a way to explain this social reality that might inform our mission in many places, beginning with a revised definition. *People are more likely to become Christ-followers when they do not have to cross language, culture, ethnic, class, or other affinity barriers.* We can best explain the theory one part at a time.

Language

Let's begin with *language.* No one with cross-cultural experience ever disputes the daunting reality of *language barriers.* Missionaries typically have to learn the host language. Few people join a church that does not speak their language. Many countries have a national language that most people learn well enough to conduct ordinary business but, in a church which does not speak their first language (which they still use at home, in which they dream), they may not recognize that the faith in the church is really for people like them.

Fifty or more language populations now live in many large cities. Some churches ignore the people's early receptive years until the national language has become effortless. A few churches offer a service that is translated to minority attendees through headphones. More churches feature several language congregations in the same church.

These churches are impressive, but with limited reach. If a church in San Diego managed five language congregations, it would still leave over 100 other language populations untouched. The case for affinity-based congregations and churches based on language is compelling. Now pioneered in some cities (such as Singapore), one day it will become contagious. Most cities will feature a constellation of ethnic-language churches *and* many churches with a half-dozen or more language congregations.

Admittedly, this is currently a hard sell with monolingual church leaders with no serious cross-cultural experience. As Roman Catholics once expected all people to worship in Latin, many American churches now welcome everyone—who will, of course, want to celebrate in English.

"Linguistic blindness" is not an American monopoly. It can take at least two different forms. Spain offers an example of one form. Since Vatican II, Roman Catholic churches in Basque regions offer masses in Basque; in those same regions, virtually all Protestant churches are Spanish only.

England offers a second, under-recognized, form. Many Anglican churches expect that, of course, the common people will resonate with "Oxbridge" English. A language barrier, in one form or another, blocks many seekers' quests nearly everywhere.

A language is a segment of its culture, so let's continue with *culture*. Geert Hofstede characterized culture as "the software of the mind." A culture is the pattern of learned assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, values, and customs that are socialized into the people's consciousness. So, when the Christian movement meets a population that has experienced a different socialization, they will be a people of a contrasting culture, with a contrasting worldview.

Earlier than Hofstede, Edward T. Hall characterized culture as "the silent language." He declared, "Culture is communication!" He taught that, in addition to their languages, cultures have other "primary message systems," such as their orientation to space and time. For example: An Englishman thinks that 100 miles is a long way, whereas an American thinks 100 years is a long time! He observed other communication systems, such as how a people subsists, learns, and plays.

His list (of ten) was not exhaustive. A people's aesthetics and their body language are obvious conduits of communication. Hall stressed one towering difference between a culture's language and its other primary message systems: Messages communicated through language engage us or miss us quite consciously, but messages communicated through other message systems engage us less consciously, often unconsciously.

Of course, many Christian mission leaders have understood, from intuition or experience, that their mission needed to communicate the gospel in indigenous ways long before cultural anthropologists came along. Effective missions and churches engage people by removing as much culture barrier as they can, and they minister in the style, language, aesthetics, and music of the host population.

Ethnicity

In many lands, pre-Christian populations experience an *ethnic* barrier. I am suggesting that *race* might be a subset of *ethnicity*. It may be the most obvious subset in places like the US and South Africa and, where it is necessary, it should indeed be explicit in the HU definition that guides us. But McGavran's field-analytic powers focused more on ethnic barriers than racial barriers. His book *Ethnic Realities and the Church* is a premier example of his thought. His world was a beautiful mosaic of ethno-linguistic peoples.

> The case for affinity-based congregations and churches based on language is compelling. Now pioneered in some cities, one day it will become contagious.

The evangelization of sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, has taken place tribe by tribe, with people reluctant to join a church of another tribe; the barrier is not race, but ethnicity. In Miami, when thousands of Haitians emigrated to South Florida, African American churches recognized that most Haitians would need their own churches; the barrier was not race, but ethnicity and language. Later, when Latinos emigrated to Miami from several nations in South America, most of the Cuban-American churches failed to engage them; same race, language, and macroculture, but serious ethnic differences.

Class

Class barriers can also influence pre-Christian populations. Eugene Nida observed that almost every society has six (vertically scaled) socioeconomic-prestige classes of people—based on factors like ancestry, wealth, education, talent, and leadership (I would add appearance). In a marvelous stroke of academic clarity, Nida named them the upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, and lower-lower classes! In a given society, a given factor (like ancestry) may weigh more in one society (like India) than in another (like Uruguay). Mobility is more possible in some societies than others.

Class *may* not be as large a barrier when a local Christian movement is young and contagious. It typically enlarges as the Church becomes more settled and established. Quite often, a church will be most effective with one of the six classes, marginally effective with adjacent classes, and ineffective with more different classes.

Perhaps the most entrenched factor within the class barrier is *literacy;* it functions somewhat like the circumcision barrier of the first century. Non-literate people typically assume that becoming a confident reader is required to become a Christian. Church leaders can be shocked at this suggestion, but one finds no pre-literate people attending Baptist Bible studies and non-readers do not flood into Episcopal churches in which attendees navigate the Book of Common Prayer.

In the US, historically, Episcopalians have served a different slice of humanity than Pentecostals. The class barrier is usually experienced more from the *underside:* "We" want them, but "they" are reluctant. The exceptions may be aspirational. In an Anglican church, I interviewed a woman who was a new member; I noticed that she was dressed "down." I asked her why her family had come to this church rather than some other. She gave several reasons including, "I would like for my pretty daughter to marry a young man from this church someday."

So, we might revise McGavran's cogent explanation as follows: *People are more likely to become Christ-followers when they do not have to cross language, culture, ethnic, class, or other affinity barriers.* In lands where *race* is a major barrier, we feature that as well. I have listed the types of barriers in descending order by their typical "height," i.e., the difficulty for most pre-Christian people to cross them. Language is often the most challenging, culture is next, etc. The height of the several challenges sometimes varies by context. For instance, if two tribes have a history of warfare between them, the ethnic barrier is probably higher. Class barriers seem to loom larger in societies like England and (especially) India. Anywhere a different type of barrier is based on any kind of affinity network, mission plans should address them specifically.

Affinity Groups Today

Many new affinity groups surface as the world changes; their existence may not even be widely perceived. Until February of 2022, for instance, who knew that CB radio and truck stop cafés, then personal computers and cell phones, would bond Canadian truck drivers (who would block bridges in
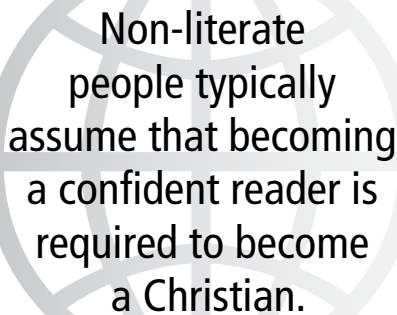
> Non-literate people typically assume that becoming a confident reader is required to become a Christian.

protesting pandemic mandates.) We now have many hundreds of first-generation affinity groups in our changing world. McGavran's "mosaic" has become a "kaleidoscope!"

Other affinity groups have been with us for millennia. Let me tell you about my rediscovery of an ancient and enduring type. In the early 1970s, I spent a week with the Methodist church in the small town of "Possum" (not the town's real name), Oklahoma, where seventy percent of the people were unchurched. As I visited non-members door-to-door, people seldom referred to the church by the denominational label; it was "the Williams church." When I asked one man if they'd ever visited the church, he said, "No, we would have been intruding!"

I spent some time with the church's records and interviewed longtime members. Sure enough, most of the members were descendants of "Old Man Williams" (now deceased) or they married into the clan. Eight names on the roll seemed to be exceptions. There was no record or memory that they ever sang in the choir, or taught a class, or served in any way. The several still alive were all inactive. I had discovered that a *clan* barrier stopped many people in metropolitan Possum, Oklahoma, from considering Methodist Christianity.

Gradually, I discovered what some of my colleagues already knew: many thousands of clan-bound churches dot America's landscape. One can find variations. Some churches include a few friends and their families—similar to the "household" churches reflected in the New Testament. The clan-bound church seems to be one natural form that the Church takes in many places. It may not be my favorite type but, in the US and many countries, we need a lot more of them.

In conclusion, I have commended the term "affinity groups" as a potential term to refer to McGavran's theory, which is perceived by other names in other academic fields. Whether or not my nomination gets a second, McGavran's core idea is indispensable to any serious mission strategy: The barriers to becoming a Christian, he said, are usually "more social than theological." The HUP, by whatever name, makes more manageable our analysis of the soils for planting the gospel seed. **IJFM**

Revisiting the Homogeneous Unit Principle
The Common Sense Principle

by Markos Zemede

Markos Zemede, MD, was born and raised in Ethiopia. He immigrated to the US as a refugee in 1984 and eventually became a physician. In 2002, he started Horn of Africa Mission to plant Christ-honoring and culture-affirming churches in the Horn of Africa and beyond. Today, more than 24,000 simple churches have been planted in the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. Zemede practices internal medicine in Fresno, CA. He is married and the proud father of three adult children.

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from a presentation given at the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship, March 3–5, 2022.

It is a great honor to be here and to share at the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship. I took Perspectives in 1999. It really changed not only my life but my family's life. Ever since then, we live differently and serve differently. And our children have been raised differently. So, I'm indebted to Dr. Ralph Winter, his team, and the entire Perspectives family.

Where Did These Movements Come From?

What I will share with you in this article about the Homogeneous Unit Principle is a direct result of what Perspectives has done for me. My presentation is simple. It's not complicated. After we took the Perspectives 15-week series of classes in 1999, my wife and I said to each other, "We can't live life the same again." I remember one of the speakers talking about the American dream. He said, "The American Dream is to buy things you don't need, with the money you don't have, to impress people you don't like. . . . So you better live for a Kingdom dream." And I thought, "You're right." My family had come to the US as poor immigrants from Africa and I had eventually finished my education by becoming a medical doctor. I knew the American dream was within reach—right there in front of me. But we were no longer the same.

We started a church planting movement in the Horn of Africa and in the last three to four years, more church-planting movements have now begun in North Africa and the Middle East. We plant simple churches. For example, in southwest Ethiopia, there is a church planting movement among the Hamar people, a nomadic people. Their churches often meet under a tree, and I like to joke that if you attend a church like that, it's a "moving experience." Every time the shade moves, you must move, too! I had been in the region in 2011 with some of our local leaders to start a movement among the Hamar. I remember meeting one young man, and he told me, "I'm learning Amharic," even though Amharic was not his native language. Amharic is the national language of Ethiopia, but the Hamar people don't speak Amharic; they have their own

native language. But this young man said, "I'm learning Amharic, so that I can become a Christian. Because the church is in Amharic, I must learn that language, and so I'm doing my best to learn it." I remember thinking to myself, "Wow! People have to jump through so many hoops to become believers."

Two years ago, when I went back there, I could hardly wait for the preacher to finish his sermon so that somebody would translate it for me. I literally had no idea what he was saying, but I was rejoicing! Finally, the Hamar people are listening to that message in their own language, and somebody's explaining the gospel to them. The preacher didn't even know how to read and write yet, but his message was very powerful. He was talking about Abraham.
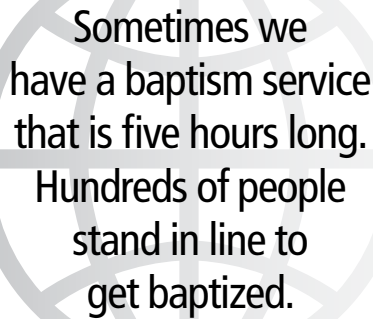
The Common Sense Principle

When you and I talk about the Homogeneous Unit Principle (or HUP), we see it from a different angle. I'm going to look at it from a practitioner's perspective and from the region where we are active. In fact, I don't even call it the Homogeneous Unit Principle. I just call it the "Common Sense Principle." It's so common sense, it just makes sense. We never did any of this just because somebody told us about the HUP. We were already doing it, and when somebody explained the HUP to us, we responded, "Yeah, of course. It makes sense." But at the same time, there is also a danger, and I will share a little bit about that as well.

Background on Evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia

Evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia is one of the fastest growing faiths. Sometimes when we baptize people, we have a baptism service that is five hours long. Hundreds of people stand in line to get baptized. God is doing great things!

Most of us in the leadership in evangelical churches in Ethiopia believe twenty-five to thirty percent of the population is now evangelical. Just to give you a picture, I left Ethiopia when I was sixteen in 1982. I knew only one evangelical family when I was in Ethiopia. I grew up in an Orthodox family, and I thought Christianity only meant Orthodox and that's all. Evangelical Christianity was unknown forty years ago, but in the last forty years, evangelicals are now twenty-five to thirty percent of the population. Our Ethiopian Prime Minister is a strong evangelical believer. There are now many evangelicals in government and leadership positions which demonstrates how fast the gospel has advanced in Ethiopia.

> Sometimes we have a baptism service that is five hours long. Hundreds of people stand in line to get baptized.

So let me sketch for you a little bit about Ethiopia. Most of you know where Ethiopia is. It's one of four countries located in the easternmost tip of Africa which is known as the Horn of Africa. It's a large country, with about 119 million people, and is the second most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria. Christianity is the largest religion. When you combine all kinds of Christians—Orthodox, evangelicals, and Catholics—we number about sixty percent or more of the population. Thirty-three percent of the population is Muslim and there are also tribal religions. There are eighty-six languages and 128 people groups, but the Amharic language is the national language. The people who are educated almost always will speak that language.

Christianity came to Ethiopia a long time ago. In Acts 8, you will have read about the Ethiopian eunuch. That was about 1,700 years before America was birthed, so it was a long time ago. But Ethiopia became a Christian nation about 330 AD. Ever since then, Christianity has been in Ethiopia.

In the last hundred years, perhaps mostly in the last fifty years, there has been a big movement towards Evangelicalism. There were Western missionaries who came to Ethiopia, but there is also a lot of indigenous evangelical mission and evangelism work. A lot of it is not by plan. It's not like we sat down and strategized together, "Okay, let's go and do this."

In fact, when you study Ethiopian evangelical work in the country (missionary work reaching the unreached), most of the churches were planted by professionals: doctors and nurses, who would go from the capital to other unreached regions; or teachers and government workers who were sent by the government. When they went, all these believers planted churches. These were not mission professionals. These were professionals who were going to do business, but they also planted churches. Because of that, they planted churches that looked like their own churches back home. That's all they knew. They knew how to worship, so they planted churches which looked and functioned exactly like the church in which they were used to worshipping. They taught everybody to worship in Amharic and sing the songs they sang back in Addis (in the capital, or wherever they came from) because that's what they knew. And wherever they went, there were unreached people groups, and churches were planted. People had to learn Amharic to be able to worship with the believers, because for the people who had started the church, Amharic was all they spoke. They brought their guitars, they were worshipping with Amharic songs, and the new believers had to learn those songs. So, most of the church planting done in the last fifty years was done by

professionals who had moved to different parts of the country for work and started churches. But the only church they had ever known was their mother church, their home church, and so the church planters carried on doing the same thing.

Now I tell our church planters,

> When you go to the unreached, and you plant a church, if you feel comfortable worshipping God in that church, you need to recognize that you've actually done a terrible job. This is because you planted a church in your own style, not their style. If you plant their church—a church that fits with them—you will feel uncomfortable, because they will worship differently from what you're used to, and they will want to do church differently. And that's not normal for you and you won't feel comfortable.

This is how we challenge them.

The other thing to know about Ethiopia is that there is a lot of ethnic strife. There is a war still going on, even now, in northern Ethiopia. There are a lot of reasons why. But ethnic strife is at the center of it: the Tigray people versus the Amhara people and the Oromo people versus the Amhara people—this is all ethnic strife. That's important to understand. How do you do HUP where there is sensitivity about ethnicity?

In America, when they hear my accent, people ask me, "Hey, you have a nice accent. Where are you from?" And I tell them. Surprisingly, when I go to Ethiopia, people still ask me, "Hey, where are you from?" But they're not asking me, "Are you from Ethiopia?" They have no doubt I'm an Ethiopian at least by birth. What they're really asking me is, "What is your ethnicity? Which part of the country do you come from?" That was so unheard of when I lived in Ethiopia. Nobody used to care who is who, and so forth, but now, there is this sensitivity. People want to know, "Which tribe are you from? Where did your parents come from?" Even the government asks you, "Which part of the country did your parents come from?"

The Hararghe Oromo Case Study

In this article on the Homogeneous Unit Principle, I'm going to focus on one people group called Hararghe Oromo. These people live in eastern Ethiopia where there are two big people groups: the Hararghe Oromo and the Somalis. From time to time, fighting breaks out between the Somalis and the Hararghe Oromo. The Hararghe Oromo are one of the largest people groups in Ethiopia. The Oromo people in general, is the largest people group in Ethiopia—about a third of Ethiopians are Oromo. But in the Oromo, there are a further twelve distinct people groups. The Hararghe Oromo who make up the eastern part of the Ethiopia Oromo group are one of the twelve. They are the third largest people group in the country, numbering about 7.2 million people. Ninety-three percent of them are Muslims, and one half of one percent are evangelical believers.

Evangelical believers now comprise more than fifty percent of some of the other Oromo people groups—in the South, in the West, and in central Ethiopia. Some of the Oromo people have also been reached. But this particular unreached people group—the Hararghe Oromo who are the largest Oromo people group—remain unreached. They speak the Oromiffa language like the rest of the Oromo people, but they are still unreached. Why is that? What happened? I will focus on this group as a case study.

The First Attempt to Evangelize the Hararghe Oromo

The first Evangelical missionaries to come to the Hararghe Oromo were Lutheran missionaries from the Scandinavian nations. That was over a hundred years ago in 1917. They came to evangelize the Hararghe Oromo and they did pretty well. But when they finished their work and returned back home, they turned the work over to Amharic-speaking Highlanders. This happened because when you come from the West as a missionary to Ethiopia—and I know many Western missionaries who lived for an extended time in Ethiopia—most of them speak the national language, the Amharic language. Those who spend time learning languages, learn Amharic first, and then, if they are able, they go on to learn the other languages where they serve.

> "When you go to the unreached and plant a church, if you feel comfortable worshipping God in that church, you've done a terrible job. This is because you planted your own church, not their church."

So, as a Westerner, when you go to Ethiopia, you learn to speak Amharic, and when you finish your job, it's natural to pass it to those who also speak Amharic. And you ask them to continue this work because you're returning home. But the problem is, when you pass it to the Amharic-speaking believers, they will continue the ministry the same way the Amharic-speaking Church does—their own way, their own culture. It will not be attractive to the indigenous people there. So that's part of the problem. These peoples' blindness is real. It's a blind spot, and if it wasn't a blind spot, you would know about it. That's why there is blindness. You don't see it. You think it's fine to say, "Hey, we're telling them about Jesus. They better come."

Allow me to illustrate this point. As most of you know, the largest Somali population outside of the Horn of Africa is in the Twin Cities—some 86,000. There are also a lot of Ethiopians in the Twin Cities, some 26,000, and a lot of Ethiopian churches are there as well. One time when we gathered them together, I remember talking to them and I said,

> Listen guys, the Somalis are right here. Let's reach them. There are no better persons to reach the Somalis than the Ethiopians. They know us. We know them. If they come to us, they're not coming to us for secondary gain. They will come to us only for the pure gospel because they know they're not going to get money from us. And they know that we're Christians, so this is our chance!

A couple of observations: one pastor said, "When they moved into my neighborhood, I just moved to another neighborhood. I don't want these Somalis to ruin my children." I thought to myself, "Oh, my God, they're so blinded. They're not realizing God is sending them to us, so let's reach them. Now, they're our neighbors."

Another pastor said, "We're trying to reach the Somalis. In fact, we planted our sister church where the Somalis live." To that pastor, I said, "Have you ever been to a mosque?" He said, "Why would I go to a mosque?" I replied,

> Exactly! Why would a Somali come to your church, if you don't go to a mosque? It's foreign to you to go to a mosque. Why would a Somali come to a church? It's equally as foreign to them, so if you want to reach the Somalis, you better reach them in their homes and start a fellowship that looks and sounds like their culture.

Even now, there is this blindness—this blindness because you can't see it, so we need to learn a lot about that. I have already mentioned the Hamar people—how they were learning the Amharic language in order to become believers. But they don't need to learn the Amharic language to become believers. Somebody just needs to share the gospel in a way they can understand.
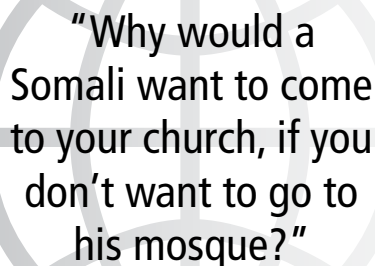
The Second (Mennonite) Effort

The second missionary effort to reach the Hararghe Oromo people happened thirty-one years later by Mennonite missionaries, and they did well. A lot of people came to Christ. Then, in 1974, communism came to Ethiopia, and the missionaries were kicked out. Those few believers who had come to Christ from the Hararghe Oromo people simply joined the Amharic-speaking churches. It cost them a lot to do that. Many of them had to change their names. Ibrahim became Abraham, Mohammed became David, or some other Christian name, and they had to dress differently. They began to speak differently. They were isolated from their communities, and that's what happened.

This was evangelism by extraction instead of reaching the whole family, and when that happens, there are difficult situations, as we will see. Our team did a survey in 2012, and did research, and found out how many Hararghe Oromo believers there are in eastern Ethiopia and where they are concentrated. To our surprise, we found about four hundred Hararghe Oromo believers. Almost all of them were in Amharic-speaking churches. In fact, in the whole region, there was only one church in the Oromiffa language, in the people's native tongue. All the other churches, the growing churches, were Amharic-speaking churches. And for someone from the Hararghe Oromo people to come and join an Amharic-speaking church in order to learn about Christ, they better figure out how to learn a whole new culture—not just the language, but how to act like the Highlanders, the Amharic-speaking people. That's the struggle.

A More Contextualized Approach

We said among ourselves that we must change this picture. There were efforts that were started in 1917 and a hundred years later, we don't have much to show. We have only four hundred or so Hararghe Oromo believers out of 7.2 million people, and even those are not connected to their own people. They are so disconnected. They are living their lives apart from their people. What happened? Why was there not much fruit? Part of the reason was the lack of any intentional effort to evangelize and plant indigenous Hararghe Oromo churches.

For example, here in the US, tens of thousands of Afghans are coming in as refugees seeking asylum. Unless someone speaks their language, knows their culture, and prepares an environment that fits their culture, we can't expect them one day to show up to our churches. It won't happen. You have to intentionally say, "Okay, how can I reach this community?"

Among the Hararghe Oromo people, there was not much contextualization of the gospel. As I said earlier, the church planters knew only their own church traditions, and nobody told them how to plant indigenous, contextualized churches or fellowships. So, they would go to a place and try to just mimic another church like their home church. And then, there's a lot of persecution. In that eastern part of Ethiopia close to the Somali border, the people are predominantly Muslims. There is a lot of persecution, and for a believer to remain in Christ, it will cost him a great deal, sometimes his very life. In fact, two months ago, one of our disciples from this particular people group had his own home burned to the ground, just because he was leading a house church. This brother, who had come

"Why would a Somali want to come to your church, if you don't want to go to his mosque?"

from Islam, never stopped. He continued preaching boldly. Then, two months later, just recently, he himself was also killed. It costs peoples' lives. I mean this is not a story that I'm making up. I'm telling you about a person I know—a person with a wife and children—who lost his life because he wanted to reach his people group and plant house churches that would fit with his people's customs and traditions.

There are not enough workers, and of course, if you're going to go as a missionary, it's easier to go to a people group where they already know Christ. They welcome you and so forth, but when there is a struggle, few people want to go there. Then a lot of people don't know how to evangelize Muslims and win them to Christ. A lot of people think they must become like us first. I love Acts 15 where the discussion was, "Do they need to become a Jew in order to be a follower of Christ?" And thank God the Jerusalem Council said no. For us, the question is the same. Do Muslims have to become evangelical believers to follow Christ? Those are the questions we always discuss and to which we need to find an answer.

> One of our disciples was leading a house church and his own home burned to the ground. He had come from Islam and continued preaching boldly. Two months later, he himself was killed. It costs peoples' lives.

Promising Work

We have had a promising work among the Hararghe Oromo since 2012. Our first Muslim believer's name was Muhammad. In fact, he is still leading our movement there and his name is still Muhammad. We told the new believers, "Keep your names, connect with your families, continue to love your people, and bring them to these house churches." And we plant house churches. In the big cities, Ethiopian, Amharic-speaking churches are like your churches here. They look exactly the same: a big keyboard, a loud sound system, a pulpit, and nice chairs. That's how church happens. But if you go to a Hararghe Oromo house church, everybody sits on the floor around the room, and they sing and have discussions. It looks very different. It does not look like a church, but that's their culture, and the churches must look like their indigenous gatherings. Our mission statement is to plant Christ-honoring culture-affirming churches, so that they can multiply. People are welcomed, and when they come, they say, "This is me. I belong here."

I attend American churches now. When I go to an Ethiopian church, I get extra excited. I say to myself, "Fine, now I can jump around here, and nobody will think I'm weird when we worship." But in an American church, if I jump and worship the way I worship in the Ethiopian church, people will say to me, "What are you doing?" So, I have to fit into the church where I attend.

When we start churches that fit the Hararghe Oromo, that include their customs and traditions, we can do great things. Currently, in the last ten years, we have started 220 house churches with 2500 believers, 928 of whom are baptized. I was at one of those baptisms. They built the baptism tub right there. It's just made out of wood and a tarp, they fill it with water, and then they baptize. If a government official or somebody were to show up, they could just remove it quickly, and it wouldn't look like a tub anymore, and nobody would know what they had been doing. All that would be left would be spilled water. I mean, it's all secretive and hidden, making sure nobody sees, but a great move of the Holy Spirit is happening, nonetheless. I know of another ministry like us, who does Disciple Making Movements (DMM). They also have over 2000 believers. So, in the last ten years, there are now over 5000 new believers. We had seen about 400 people come to the Lord in the past 100 years, and now we have seen over 5000 in the last ten years! We believe this will continue to multiply. We now have twenty-six full-time workers reaching them.

The Benefits of the Common Sense Principle

What are the benefits of what I'm calling the Common Sense Principle? As I said earlier, for me, the Homogeneous Unit Principle is the Common Sense Principle. It's common sense. You want to reach an unreached people group. You better go and find them and keep them in their families and kinship groups and then encourage them to go and love people who are like them. Bring the whole family. And start a fellowship and encourage them to grow. It just makes sense at least in the region where we are serving. It just makes sense. It is way easier to do that.

I remember one time in our training, a Muslim follower of Christ stood and said with tears,

> I wish I had known fifty years ago what I know now; if I had known this when I was young, I would have loved Jesus for fifty years. But it just happened now, I learned the truth now when I'm old.

He went on to say,

> When I was young, people came to our village and told us about Jesus, but they told us, "You must change how you dress. You must change your culture. You must change your name. You must become like us." So we said, "No way, get out of here, we don't want to hear this gospel," but now you have come and you have told us to stay the way we are, that we can still love Jesus and follow him.

He continued,

> I wish somebody had told me that a long time ago. Now, it's easy for me to go and share with my family, my children, and the next village. It is so easy.

That's why I'm saying it is common sense.

In the indigenous Hararghe Oromo church, momentum builds naturally. In rural parts of eastern Ethiopia, most of the people are one tribe, so it is easy for the gospel to spread like wildfire as it moves from one place to another

The Danger of the HUP (Common Sense Principle)

When I think of the HUP, this is how I look at it: it is a small key that opens a big door—a big door of an unreached people group—that's the benefit. After you enter that gate, if you use the same key to lock the door behind you, then that's where the danger is. That door must remain open, so that these people are not just isolated as one people group keeping the gospel just for themselves, because as you know, that's not our assignment.

As believers, our one assignment is to make disciples of all nations. That must be something we always keep in front of us. We must make disciples of all nations, not just the Hararghe Oromo. To enter a people group with the gospel, we need this key, but the door must remain open.

So as leaders, we must be mature enough to help the people from day one to pray for the next tribe, to pray for the unreached people in their communities, to remember other peoples, and to encourage them. We must love them. We must share what we know with them, so that they can also gather like us and follow Christ. That must be done early on, so that's very important. In Matthew 10, Jesus told the twelve disciples to go to the House of Israel. He's not telling them to *stay* there, but to *start* there. Later he will tell them, "Okay, now you're going to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" but they must start somewhere.

For me, HUP is that. It's an ignition, a key that opens doors, but it's not a key to lock behind you. You must keep the door open.

So, what's the danger? The danger comes when we lock the door, stick to our own kind, keep the gospel to ourselves. A movement, by definition, moves from one place to another. If it stays in one place, it's not a movement. If you're going to have a people movement—a church planting movement, a disciple making movement—if it is going to be a movement, it better go beyond what you're doing.

So, if the door is open, and once you enter, you lock the door, then you stop the movement. That's why you need a wise leader, a leader who understands his people, a leader who understands the Bible, a leader who will equip others.

Now, we have the gospel. Let's pray for the family but not just our family—beyond that. I mean look at us here. Why in the world did we come here to this conference? Because for all of us, HUP means something—that's why we came. In a small way, we here are a homogeneous unit attracted or conflicted by the HUP concept. But when we leave, we're going to go and do our own thing. We're not going to be stuck here just for ourselves. So also in HUP, don't just hold it as an end unto itself. It's just a beginning, a starting point, an ignition point. And once you do that, make sure you keep advancing. That's why you need key leaders.

I don't know if you know this story. Most of the water for the Nile River comes from Ethiopia. The Nile comes from two source regions: in Uganda and Ethiopia. The two Niles connect in Khartoum, Sudan. In fact, Ethiopia is building a big dam on the Nile River, in order to start getting energy. That was a big issue with Sudan and Egypt both of whom feared that they might lose their water. But Ethiopia continued to reassure them that Ethiopia won't stop the water. They will get their water, but Ethiopia needs to get energy from the water, too.

For me, that's a picture of a movement. The movement is the Nile that must continue to flow, so that the Sudanese will drink, and the Egyptians will drink, and the water must continue. But at the same time, you can build a dam and benefit your own people too.

> A Muslim follower of Christ said with tears, "I wish I had known fifty years ago what I know now—that I didn't have to change my culture, how I dress, or my name. I would have loved Jesus for fifty years."

Going back to the Common Sense Principle, it's okay to benefit our people group, our family, our tribe, but the blessing of God must continue to flow like the river Nile and give water and life to the next tribe and the next tribe and the next tribe. That must happen.

An interesting discussion took place between some of our church planters and some of the new believers from this people group, the Hararghe Oromo. The new believers said to some of the church planters,

> Okay, where you come from, you guys have a big church, a sound system, and you sit down on chairs like this, and you worship like this, whereas we sit down on the floor with no

sound systems, and no church buildings, and so, who are we? Are we like you or are we something else? Are we Muslims or are we evangelicals?

That's a good question to ask. A question of identity. Who are we? And I love the answer of our leaders. They said,

> You go and ask God, and he will tell you who you are. We can't tell you that you are evangelicals, or this or that. Ask God. You are followers of Christ. Now you, too, have access to him. Go ask him.

What happened was that most of them said,

> We are Muslims who follow Christ, and we follow the Bible. We are Muslims because to be Muslim is more than religion. That's our way of life. And the Bible is our guidance, and we will go through that.

Others, a few of them, said,

> I don't want to remain in the house church. I want to be free to worship God the way you guys worship. I'm going to come to the big church in the city and join you.

And that's okay. At least, they get to make the decision themselves. But the rest said,

> No, we want to stay in the house church model. We will continue reaching our families and neighbors and relatives and continue to advance God's Kingdom.

That's the way it should be. If everyone moves into the big churches of another culture, there is a big problem. It will kill the movement. It will come to an end.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a few general observations. The HUP is very effective in rural Africa, where most people who are living together are from the same people group. That was our observation. When it comes to urban settings, it could be different. I know there is another approach for urban settings, and I will leave it there.

But it's very crucial as we start reaching people groups through the Homogeneous Unit Principle that we expose them to other people groups. And Jesus is very, very strategic in this. I don't know if you ever ask this question, but sometimes I ask this, "What would the disciples say if when Jesus first met them, he had said, 'Follow me, and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth?'" They would have said, "What, Samaria? I'm out of here. I'm going home." But he told them this at the end in Acts 1:8, after he had trained them and showed them his life, and after he had himself witnessed to the Samaritans. John 4 is a wonderful chapter—you know, the woman at the well. Jesus had a conversation with this Samaritan woman and revealed himself to her. She left her jar to tell her community about Jesus. The

woman came back with them, and they begged him to stay with them for two or three days. Jesus said, "I guess they're inviting us, so let's go to their home." The disciples were thinking to themselves, "What? We're going to go to their homes, sleep in their beds, and eat and drink using their utensils?" But Jesus was saying to them, "I mean, they invited us, so let's go." He was preparing them for the coming ministry.

So as leaders, that's the strategy. How can we start by using the HUP in the initial encounters and discipleship training? But how can we also use that to train (from the gospel) the Hararghe Oromo about how to love the Somalis or other people groups? That's the burden of the leader to help them and to show them.
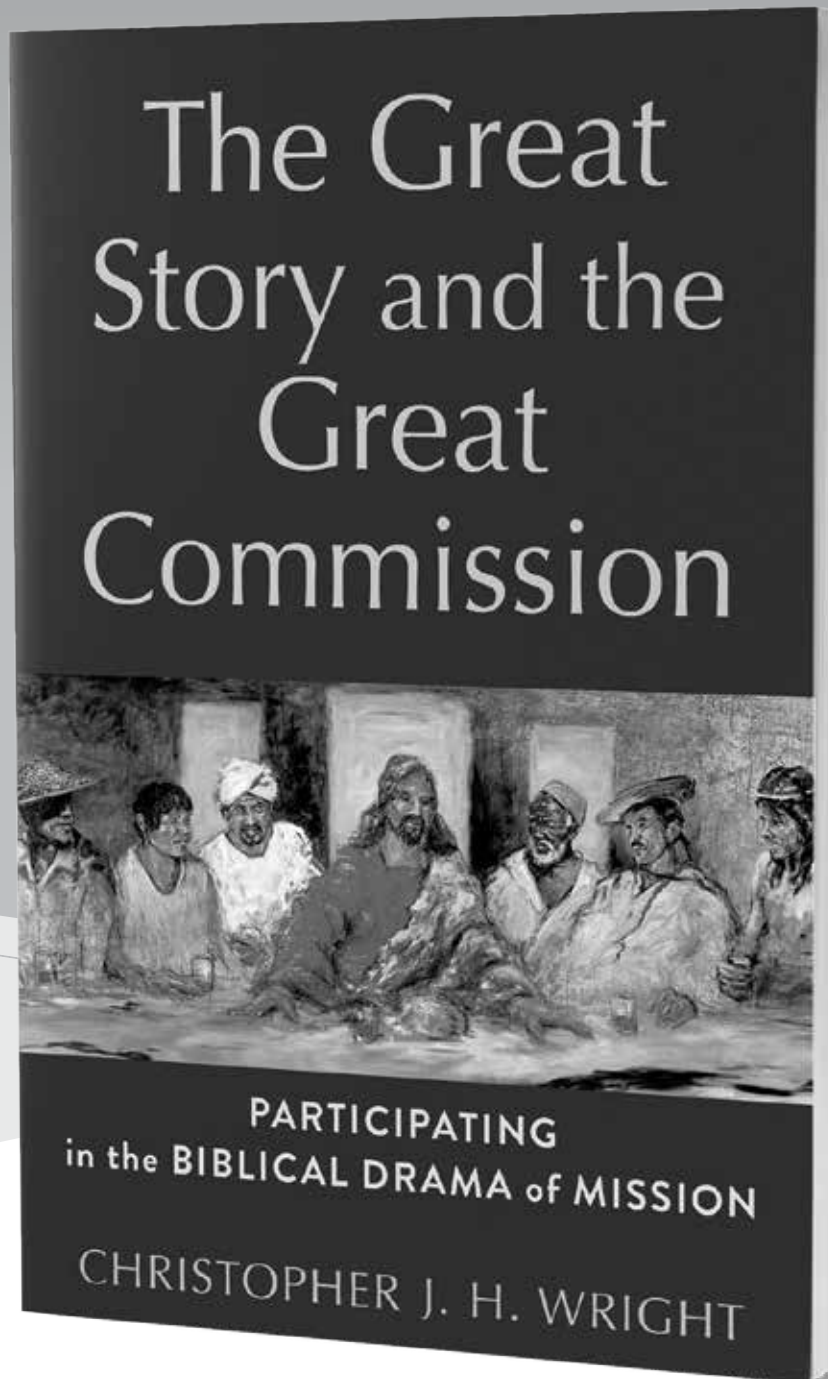
> # A few others said, "I'm going to come to the big church in the city and join you." But if everyone moves into the big churches of another culture, it will kill the movement.

My last point is this: unity in the body of Christ. One of the leaders in Ethiopia said that it's not good to deny the HUP for the sake of unity with others, but also, it is not good to deny unity with the body of Christ just for the sake of maintaining the HUP. That's why we need wisdom from the Holy Spirit.

I really like that because the Holy Spirit must guide us in each scenario. We don't decide in the boardroom what we will do on the field. We must allow the field leaders to be led by the Holy Spirit and know when to say yes and when to say no. My last point is that all people groups have a natural right to know and worship God in their own language in a way that affirms their culture. At the same time, all believers are called to make disciples of all nations. Therefore, we can start with the HUP, but we must not stay there. The heart of God is for all people. Somebody mentioned Acts 11:20 earlier. I love that! A couple of guys from Cyprus and Libya, said to themselves, "What would happen if we were to take this gospel and instead of just going to the Jews, we would go to the Gentiles?" That was God's heart. There was a huge blessing, and the church in Antioch was birthed out of that. So, we must help others. For us, the HUP is a methodology, not a theology. It opens up a great door for evangelism, and as leaders we must use that to advance God's Kingdom beyond a given unreached people group. **IJFM**

Complex Homogeneity among Urbanized UPGs:
A Challenge and An Opportunity

by Chris Clayman

Chris Clayman is the executive director of Joshua Project, an initiative that provides a destination map for the Great Commission by highlighting peoples and places with the least access or response to the gospel, so the body of Christ can prioritize its prayer and missions efforts. He has been involved in pioneer mission work in West Africa and New York City among Muslim peoples, and he has initiated and helped develop numerous mobilization and outreach efforts focused on unreached peoples, including Global Gates, Heart for Muslims, Welcome Africans, and UPG North America. Chris is also the author of Superplan: a journey into God's story, *and* ethNYcity: The Nations, Tongues, and Faiths of Metropolitan New York. *He lives with his wife Nichole and three children in New York City. Links to these initiatives and contact information can be found at linktr.ee/chrisclayman.*

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The cultural mosaic of New York City exposes humanity's complex inclinations to preserve ethnolinguistic homogeneous unity, establish hybrid identities, and form urban tribes around fluid social interests. Ultra-orthodox Jewish communities, even in the third or fourth generation, form towns and neighborhoods with dress codes,[1] strictly enforce behavioral norms, and organize resistance to outsiders. A 2012 conference in Queens on the dangers of the Internet filled baseball and tennis stadiums with 60,000 ultra-Orthodox men![2] At the same time, one can buy hoagies (Italian) from Yemeni-owned *bodegas* (Spanish for convenience stores), Tex Mex from Chinese, gyros (Middle Eastern) and donuts from Bangladeshis, and African American soul food from West Africans in Korean-owned restaurants. Beyond ethnic fusions, social groupings form around a myriad of social, professional, and religious interests. The city's population is so large that special interest communities like *larpers* (people who dress as characters and perform Live Action Role Play) and *bronies* (male lovers of My Little Pony) all find their place.

Amidst the complexity of urban communities, missiologists are questioning the usefulness of rallying missions efforts around ethnolinguistic based lists of unreached people groups (UPGs).[3] I have studied diaspora groups and worked among Muslim peoples for two decades in New York City, and I still regard the homogeneity of ethnolinguistic people groups as the primary influencer on global urban migrants. At the same time, I have observed the social fragmentation and adaptation of these same peoples, through which new challenges and opportunities for missiological breakthroughs emerge. Instead of beginning with theoretical observations, allow me to introduce Kadijata's (pseudonym) personal narrative to frame the discussion.

Kadijata

From birth, Kadijata breached cultural norms in her country. Her mother, a Fulbe Futa, which is a subset of the larger Fulani people cluster, married one of the "forest peoples" of Guinea, West Africa. The Fulbe Futa people

looked down on the forest people, and her mother's family begrudged her divergence from endogamy. Shortly after Kadijata was born in Guinea's forest region, her family moved to Conakry, the country's capital. In the city, Kadijata's Fulbe Futa side quickly predominated. Kadijata's mother spoke to her in Pular, the Fulbe Futa language, and Fulani family members from across the country frequented her home. In contrast, in order to "set Kadijata up for success," her father only spoke to her in French. Month-long summer vacations were spent in the Futa Jalon (the Fulani region) instead of the forest. At the age of eight, Kadijata's father moved to Eastern Europe for work. From that point on, she only saw her father when he returned on vacations. The residential and linguistic choices of Kadijata's family meant her father's ethnic identity effectively had no influence on his daughter. As far back as Kadijata can remember, she was always a Fulbe Futa.

While Kadijata spoke Pular and French at home and school, she also learned the lingua franca of Conakry, called Susu after the dominant ethnic group in the city, as well as Maninka to converse with her friends from that ethnic group. Because her family were devout Muslims, she also attended an Islamic school on weekends to learn and memorize the Qur'an in Arabic. Shortly after her dad moved to Eastern Europe, Kadijata's mom spent years with her husband in Europe or her brother in East Africa, leaving various aunts and cousins to take care of Kadijata and her siblings in Conakry. The international work and travel of her extended family piqued Kadijata's global interests. As a teenager, Kadijata became the second best junior table tennis player in her country, and she traveled to China as a Junior Olympian. There, she befriended competitors from Sri Lanka and Ethiopia, and she continued corresponding with them for years.

At the age of 21, Kadijata received a scholarship to study telecommunications in Eastern Europe. She learned the language quickly and finished the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in five years. Kadijata then moved to Paris to pursue a master's degree and doctorate. Her plans were curtailed, however, when a relationship she formed with a fellow international student from Africa led to pregnancy. Kadijata's conservative Islamic family felt shame over the ordeal, and Kadijata felt abandoned through their lack of support. Furthermore, her relationship with the baby's father ended, leaving her as the sole provider for her baby daughter. She managed to almost complete her master's degree but the mounting pressure of single motherhood caused her to leave school and pursue a telecommunications career.

Kadijata earned a nice salary in Paris. She was promoted quickly through the company, frequently traveled throughout France on business trips, and purchased a condo in southeast Paris. Her best friends were Caucasian French co-workers and neighbors, Senegalese families in her neighborhood, and Algerian, Caribbean, and Asian colleagues. But none of those friends were Fulani. Kadijata was hurt by her people for the way they treated her after becoming pregnant. She threw herself into her work and quickly adopted a French lifestyle. When asked what people she belonged to during that time, Kadijata said, "I was French. To some people I would identify as African or Guinean, but I was French." Noticeably absent was an identification with the Fulbe Futa, from whom she had steadily distanced herself.

One of Kadijata's co-workers was a Cambodian immigrant who had married a Muslim-background Christian pastor from Mali. Knowing about the West African Muslim culture, the co-worker was burdened to pray for Kadijata and share Jesus with her. At an opportune time, she gave Kadijata a recorded testimony in French of a West African imam who had turned to Christ. Kadijata knew a lot about the Qur'an but she was unfamiliar with verses the former imam cited about Jesus' followers being superior to those who reject faith in the Day of Resurrection (Al-Imran 3:55) or those having doubts being encouraged to ask Christians (i.e., those who have been reading the "before books," Yunus 10:94). From her Islamic religious worldview, these verses gave her confidence to attend church and read the Bible. Soon after, she decided to follow Christ and was baptized.

Kadijata continued to be discipled in multiethnic French churches. For the next 13 years, she grew in faith, became a woman of prayer, and shared Jesus with others. Kadijata even wrote long notes to her family shortly before her baptism explaining why she followed Jesus. While her decision ostracized her even more from her family, several of her family members had moved to France and Italy, and she was able to continue in relationship with some individuals. Her father, an influential man, became a follower of Christ as well, partly due to Kadijata's witness. He then went on to share Jesus with many people back in Guinea, and one of Kadijata's sisters came to Christ and is now married to a pastor.

Thirteen years after becoming a Christian, God called Kadijata to be a missionary in New York City. Through a variety of divine appointments, including an offer of free housing in Manhattan from a local church connection, Kadijata moved to New York and began learning English. One day, she observed a rally

> She was unfamiliar with verses the former imam cited about Jesus' followers in the Day of Resurrection (Al-Imran 3:55).

of Hispanic and African Americans who were beleaguered by the drug and crime epidemic in their communities. Moved by their cries, Kadijata began ministering among the homeless and drug addicts. She fed them, pointed them to social centers for counseling, shared the gospel, prayed for them, and started Bible studies. Meanwhile, Kadijata frequently passed by dozens of West African Muslim women in hair braiding shops, the subway, and on the streets. A missionary family who was spreading a vision to reach West African Muslims in the city, also formed a relationship with Kadijata. One day, on the way to church, Kadijata met a Fulani cab driver who knew her family and revealed that dozens of her extended family members were in the city. Being estranged from many members of the family, Kadijata had no idea!

All these events set in motion God's call for Kadijata to share Jesus with the Fulbe Futa and other West African Muslim women. As she began meeting the Fulbe Futa community, she realized that many women only spoke Pular. Even though Kadijata's first language was Pular, she struggled to talk about Jesus, share from the Bible, or pray in her own language. She was more comfortable talking about her faith not in only French, but also in English! To remedy the cultural disconnect, Kadijata began reading and listening to the Bible, praying, and sharing about Jesus in her mother tongue, which connected to her heart in new ways.

Kadijata had rarely heard of Christians from her people group but she began discovering hundreds who had come to faith in Christ in Africa and Europe. Through joining their social media groups, praying with them, and aiding their evangelism campaigns, she effectively joined a global Fulbe Futa Christian community. Kadijata's family observed her life transforming faith journey which had taken place over the past three decades of her life, and many have opened fellowship with her again. Because of Kadijata's strong character, Muslim family members call on her to give wisdom and counsel in life's varied complications. Kadijata has come full circle. She desires nothing more than to glorify Christ with her life and to be used to introduce her Fulani people to His Kingdom. She's a member of God's family, and she's also Fulbe Futa—with a French accent. Her story illuminates several observations applicable to other hybridized members of UPGs in cities.

Global Urban Migrants from UPGs Have Foundational Worldviews that Continue Shaping their Lives

Even in the increasingly pluralistic and individualistic culture of the United States, Barna studies have shown that people's moral foundations are generally in place by age nine, and their worldview is firmly in place by age thirteen. From that point on, people's worldviews are simply refined, reinforced, or applied in different ways throughout life's stages.[4] Among the

community-centric, honor shame cultures that comprise the remaining UPGs of the world, one can assume their foundational worldviews are set even earlier and their worldview boundaries more fixed.

Paul Hiebert defines worldview as the:

> fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives. Worldviews are what people in a community take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living.[5]

In my experience with global urban migrants from UPGs in New York City, their worldviews remain fundamentally the same as they have throughout their lives. There are always some value shifts and variances, but their core worldviews remain intact. It has been comical to observe event-oriented West Africans hold events in time-oriented New York City culture. On one occasion, I was invited to an event that was to start at 9:30 pm. Knowing better, I petitioned the organizer to tell me the actual starting time. His values had apparently been influenced by the city culture because he claimed, "It will start at 9:30 pm sharp. It has to. We can't keep living this way." So, I showed up at 11 pm, only to find I was among the first to arrive, and the doors were still unopened. The event didn't begin until 1:30 am, four hours after the stated time.

No matter what global experiences and relationships people have, they have a sense of who is permissible for them to marry to perpetuate a unique sense of ethnic identity and descent.

Worldviews, observed Hiebert, "conserve old ways and provide stability in cultures over long periods of time."[6] There are primordial aspects of ethnicity, both biological and cultural, that act as primary influencers on global urban migrants. No matter what global experiences and relationships people have, they have a sense of who is permissible for them to marry in order to perpetuate a unique sense of ethnic identity and descent. Not everyone heeds that cultural pressure, but the presence of the pressure attests to the biological aspect of ethnicity. Shyamal Kataria observes that,

> The practice of endogamy not only helps keep ethnicity intact but *forms* the very basis for the separate identity itself. . . . It is undeniable that genealogy is one of the more objective indicators of ethnicity.[7]

Common kinship, language, or religion are primordial cultural aspects that ground global urban migrants in foundational identities. Clifford Geertz states that,

> These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on . . . have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself.[8]

In the case of Kadijata, there are primordial aspects of her birth mother being Fulbe Futa and the reinforcement of Fulbe Futa linguaculture throughout her upbringing that, despite all her outside influences, have served as her identity framework. Even when she identified more as French, this shift was a reaction to her Fulbe Futa framework disapproving of her and failing to functionally support her desire to belong. The pain she experienced during that time was initiated by breaching the cultural norms and not through a planned desire to leave or change her ethnicity. Kadijata still shared the most homogeneity with her Fulbe Futa people. In the 1977 Lausanne Consultation on the Homogeneous Unit Principle, Charles Kraft stated, "The more shared factors or criteria between the members of a group, the higher the degree of homogeneity."[9] The connection of personal identity at birth to generations of history is not easily dissolved. The establishment of a foundational worldview during childhood is difficult to replace or alter.

The Experiences of Global Urban Migrants Force Them to Reshape their Ethnic Identity and Worldview

Missiologists such as Len Bartlotti have initiated discussions to reevaluate our unreached people group lists due to their simplistic ethnolinguistic primordial views of ethnicity.[10] He is correct to point out that instrumentalist and constructivist views of ethnicity should also be integrated into our understanding of ethnicity, especially as it relates to on-the-ground strategy. An instrumentalist view of ethnicity focuses on the role state institutions, elites, and societal politics have on inventing cultural traditions and manufacturing or maintaining ethnic identity. It's a top down view of ethnicity that ignores inconvenient historical events and, instead, reinforces symbols, heroes, and messages that forge people toward a common goal.[11] Constructivism views ethnicity as social constructions influenced by broader culture, technology, politics, and other social factors. It maintains that people can have multiple ethnic identities, and they move fluidly in and out of these based on what is most advantageous.[12]

In an age when outside ideas, values, and beliefs barrage people's phones through social media channels, competing with their primordial ideals, one can't ignore the influence of instrumentalism and constructivism. The problem with reimagining unreached people groups lists, however, is that constructivist ethnic identities are too fluid for categorizing them effectively into mobilization lists. Even constructivist proponents admit that:

> Constructivist arguments are themselves so amorphous . . . that incorporating them into our theories of politics and economics is a difficult task.[13]

I concur with Dan Scribner, Joshua Project's founding director, that ethnolinguistic or ethnoreligious unreached people group lists are still needed to inspire and mobilize people toward a general missions need, but that local workers will need to form evangelism strategies based on the more complex realities of ethnic identities and groupings.[14]

Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, etc. don't remain unreached with the gospel because of their religion. They remain unreached because they belong to people groups whose greatest value is solidarity with the group, of which religion is one component. Global urban migrants, especially since technological advancement has allowed them to stay daily connected to home, become gatekeepers and influencers for reshaping their people's ethnic boundaries, values, and beliefs. Their proximity to new ideas, education, and relationships outside of their primordial culture often causes them to refigure their views of reality. Because they financially support the economy through remittances and achieve heightened status in the minds of their friends and family back home due to their perceived success, they are uniquely positioned to reshape the permissible values, beliefs, and ethnic boundaries of their people. They are on the fringe of solidarity with their people because of their experiences, creating enough distance from the homogeneous unit to confidently make divergent choices. Their influence and stature with their people, however, keep their divergent ideas and values from being completely discarded. In fact, these global urban migrants are often the trusted gatekeepers their people look to for interpreting and adopting new realities.

In *Transforming Worldviews,* Paul Hiebert explains that people create frameworks (i.e., worldviews) to make sense of their experiences. Sometimes, and this happens increasingly for global urban migrants, their new experiences don't match their interpretive framework. Hiebert states, "People experience a worldview crisis when there is a gap between

Global urban migrants are often the trusted gatekeepers their people look to for interpreting and adopting new realities.

their worldview and their experience of reality."[15] The human tendency is to somehow fit those divergent experiences into their existing worldview. Even if they have to refigure or reinterpret their foundational worldview, they are still operating from their preexisting paradigm.

A West African imam in Harlem once told me,

> If I gave a dollar to ten Muslims and told them to return tomorrow with my money, only one would return. If I gave a dollar to ten Christians and told them to return tomorrow with my money, nine would return. What does that show you?

I wanted to say, "The moral superiority of Christians," but instead asked, "What?"

He replied, "It shows you that those Christians are better Muslims than the Muslims."

In his worldview at that time, the righteous ones of God were Muslims, so when he experienced new points of reality from Christians, he interpreted their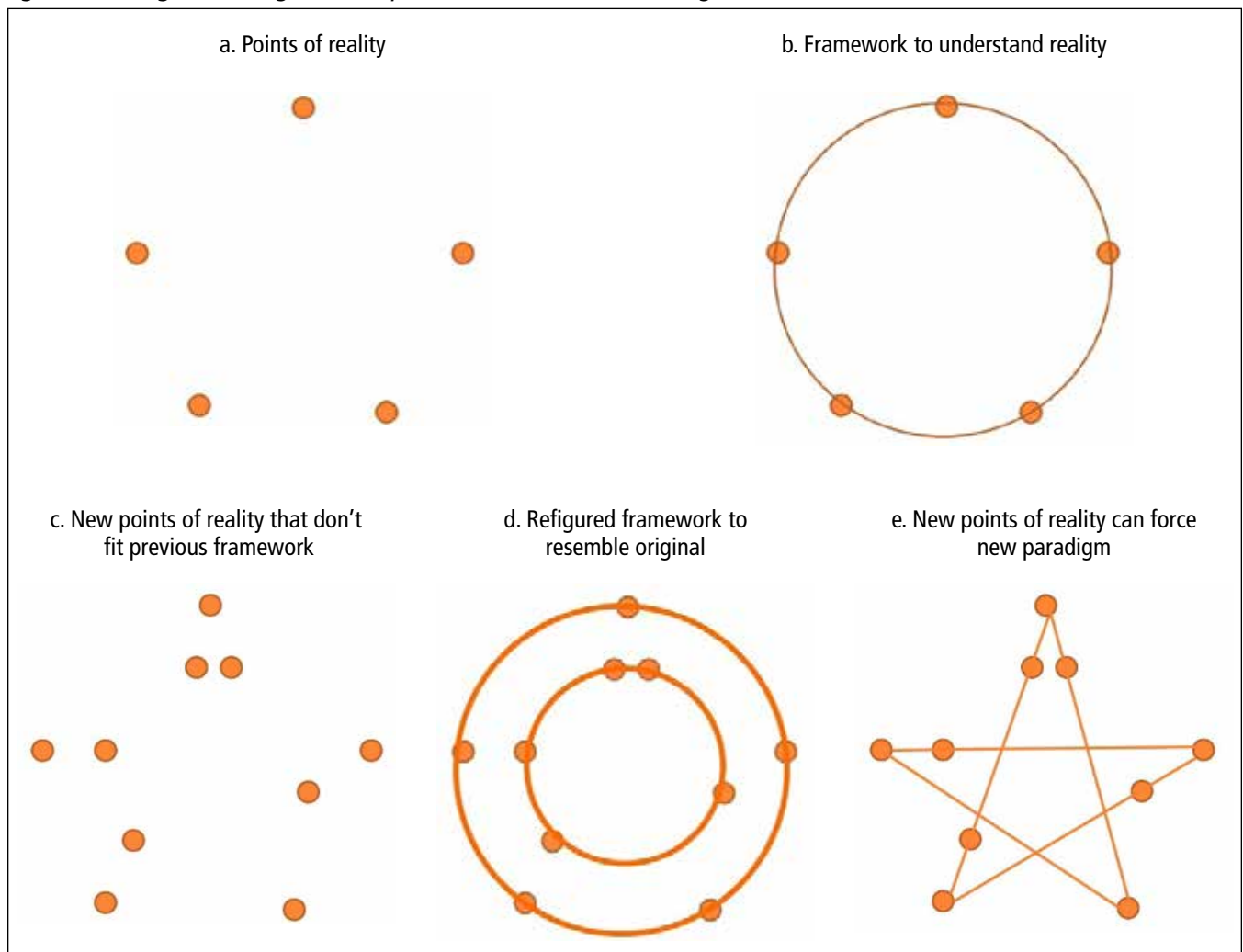 honest deeds as Muslim acts to fit his framework. At some point, however, the points of reality become too far out of the framework and a new paradigm is constructed. (See figure 1 below) This same imam told me years later:

> We Muslims think we know Jesus, but I realized we can't know him from the Qur'an. We have to know him from the Bible. Just as Jesus died for the people, so I want to give my life away for others.

Global Urban Migrants from UPGs Still Have Ethnic and Linguistic Barriers to the Gospel

Donald McGavran defined a homogeneous unit as "a section of society in which all members have some characteristic in common,"[16] and he observed that "[people] like to turn to Christ without crossing ethnic and linguistic barriers."[17] Most global urban migrants retain the most characteristics and deepest bonds with their lifelong ethnic group. Despite their experiences in cross-cultural relationships and skills in different languages, ethnic and linguistic barriers to the gospel among unreached people groups remain. Just as people group

Figure 1. Paradigm shift diagrams (Adapted from Hiebert, Transforming Worldviews, *49)*

a. Points of reality

b. Framework to understand reality

c. New points of reality that don't fit previous framework

d. Refigured framework to resemble original

e. New points of reality can force new paradigm

methodology exposed blind spots in missions strategy by helping evangelists see beyond geography, it is pertinent that urban missiology not become so geographically focused that strong global networks and bonds of ethnic groups are ignored.

Most members of unreached people groups in New York City, for example, are more connected with friends and family in their homeland or other diaspora communities than they are with their next door neighbors; that is, unless their apartment complexes have been taken over as virtual villages of their people groups, which often happens. As Kadijata met more of her Fulbe Futa people in New York City, she realized that many of them did not speak adequate French or English to understand the gospel, and she was compelled to increase her skill and use of biblical Pular so they could understand.

Global Urban Migrants from UPGs Occupy Multiple Homogeneous Units in Cities, But Not All Are Equal

Constructivist views of ethnicity point out that people carry multiple ethnic identities, constructing these identities by whatever seems advantageous in relating to broader society. In the United States, a Jamaican might identify as American, or as black American or African American because of the influence of the nation's racial categories on politics and power structures. Among African Americans, however, they might distinguish themselves as Caribbean, among Caribbeans as Jamaican, and among Jamaicans as Kingstonian.

While the homogeneous unit principle's relationship to unreached people group missiology has largely been ethnolinguistic, the original principle included social or any other characteristics people have in common. In urban centers, such homogeneous units (HUs) are innumerable, and global urban migrants from UPGs will likely belong to many HUs based on ethnicity, ancestry, hobbies, interests, vocations, geographic

settings, stages of life, etc. In Kadijata's life, she belonged to many HUs, including Fulbe Futa, Fulani, Guineans, Africans, French, female Parisians, internationally competitive table tennis players, women business professionals, single moms, condo owners in southeast Paris, international students, telecommunications master's students, churches, etc.

Among the urbanized diaspora, people's identities broaden and soften. McIntosh and McMahan point out that "in urban contexts where people are regularly exposed to tremendous individual variation . . . category width tends to be wider."[18] Category width refers to the number of items or elements people place under a single category. For instance, an urban individual with exposure to many viewpoints likely has a broader category width for what is good or permissible than someone with limited exposure to people of different worldviews. In researching unreached people group communities for the UPG North America initiative, as well as for my book *ethNYcity*,[19] I've seen how, after migration, some people adopt a softened nationalistic or "region of origin" identity more than a rigid ethnolinguistic identity.

While urbanized diaspora identities broaden and soften, their allegiances narrow and diminish. They simultaneously broaden the category width of "my people" while narrowing the category width of those to whom they pledge strong allegiance. If Kadijata was raised in her mother's village, she likely would have only had Fulbe Futa friends and would have felt allegiance to the Fulbe Futa group as a whole. In village life, when someone breaches the cultural code, the village takes responsibility for correcting the behavior, not just the person's family. Honor and shame are felt by the entire community, not just by individuals or individual families. In Kadijata's case, her urban upbringing already contributed to her broadening identity and narrowed allegiances, which increased even more after emigration. Most West Africans I've met in New York City rarely

Figure 2. Shifting Identities and Allegiances

Among the Urbanized Diaspora

Broadened and Softened Identities

Narrowed and Diminished Allegiances
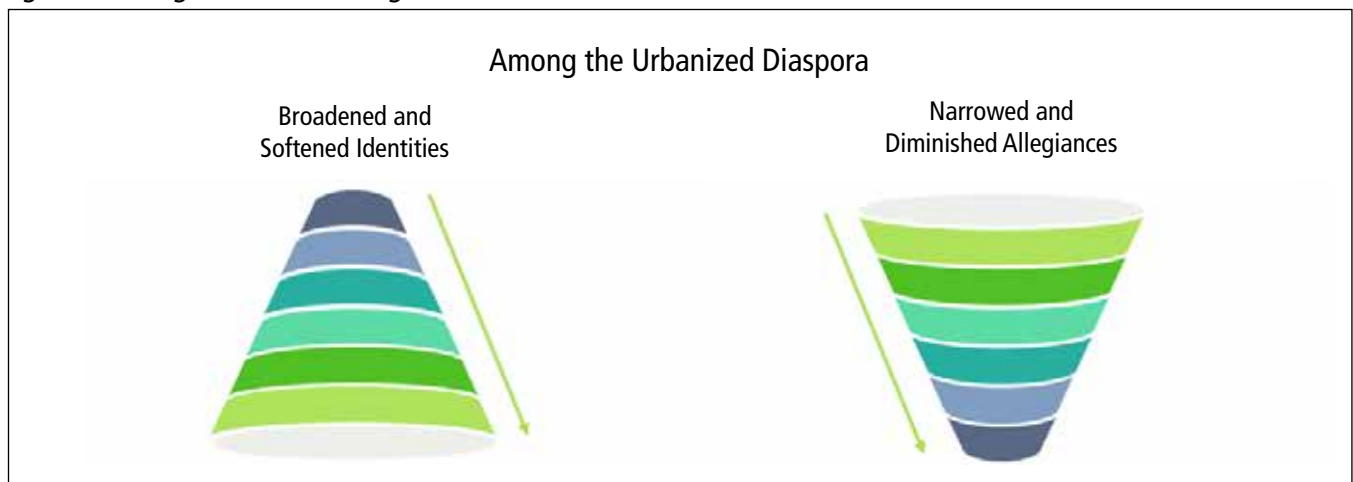
contribute to community development and group projects back home. They are primarily concerned with building houses and businesses for their families. They broaden their identities in the city to other West African Muslims or people from their countries, but their allegiances narrow to their families instead of the larger ethnic community. See figure 2 on page 62.

> # A Muslim-background Christian who moved to NYC to escape persecution from his people reversed his status, becoming his village's honored representative in America.

While global urban migrants belong to multiple HUs in cities, these HUs vary in durability and "stickiness." A person might be a part of an HU soccer team with people from multiple nationalities that play once a month. These soccer players could have different preferred languages and might not have any relationship with one another apart from the soccer matches. The HU only remains as long as the team stays together and is based on one category. It is unlikely that such an HU will play a major role on a person's deep values and beliefs. On the other hand, this person might be a devout Muslim who belongs to a Muslim student society on campus through which deep relationships develop with Muslims from other ethnicities and regions of the world. At a formulative stage in life with the "stickiness" of a major shared belief, this HU has much more potential for reshaping someone's identity and worldview, especially if that person marries someone from another culture. The influence of HUs in cities vary widely on their inhabitants.

New Challenges and Opportunities for Missiological Breakthroughs Exist among Global Urban Migrants

There are multiple challenges and opportunities presented in the complexity of urban environments for reaching UPGs. I'll highlight particular observations regarding social fragmentation, hybridity, desire for unity, and the influence of host culture.

Social fragmentation

Global urban migrants experience socially fragmented lives through the busyness of cities and renegotiation of their ethnic identities and allegiances. Ed Alansky comments about his experience in Delhi:

> I would say that urbanization has increased the challenge of starting movements by isolating individuals and nuclear family units from their wider relationships of trust without

replacing those relationships with new relationships of trust. Surrounded by more people than ever, people seem to be increasingly alone. Therefore, it seems plausible that despite our best efforts to adapt and capitalize, urbanization represents, for the present, a net challenge to mission movements regardless of our paradigm of "people group" or identity. Even as we seek to adapt in the face of new challenges, we need to be careful not to hastily blame "people group" paradigms when the challenge might really be social fragmentation itself. Phenomena such as multiple-identities, multi-ethnic churches, and urban networks are, in my view, symptoms of that fragmentation, rather than promising alternatives to people groups.[20]

One of the reasons we started Global Gates, whose vision is to reach the ends of the earth through global gateway cities, is that almost all success stories around the world of movements to Christ are among rural people. But almost everyone in the world now lives in cities or is directly affected by cities. Even the mud hut-no electricity-no running water village where I lived in Mali now has cell phones connecting them to influential family members in cities. As Alan McMahan proposes, a fourth missions era is arriving,[21] and the challenge of urbanization should not dissuade us from "failing forward" as God refines our missional approaches.

On the positive side of social fragmentation, global urban migrants experience reduced scrutiny from their people due to their fringe status, and they are often influential gatekeepers for disseminating new ideas and values. What a great space for the gospel! Multiple West African Muslims in New York have made statements like, "Our people don't understand Jesus, so I will send these (gospel) resources back to them so they can understand," or, "I have initiated talks with my people back home to get close to Christians to understand them better." A Muslim-background Christian who moved to New York City to escape persecution from his people effectively reversed his status, becoming his village's honored "representative in America." He introduced a network of Christians to his village that resulted in dozens of baptized followers of Christ.[22]

Kadijata was already outside of the solidarity of her people when she became a Christian, so her conversion only widened the separation. Fringe people within people groups who follow Christ face the risk of being pushed out altogether by their people. Even if people are so fringe or separate that they will not influence a large amount of people from their ethnic group, they can still be a beachhead through whom core individuals of unreached people groups can hear the gospel. Kadijata was used by God to see her father come to Christ, who was then the main influencer for leading other family members and friends to do the same.

Some global urban migrants, despite their status as gatekeepers for new ideas and values, see their social fragmentation as deterrents for making decisions to follow Christ. A West African Muslim man who has studied the Bible with me for many years believes the Bible is true in his head, and he has even shared the gospel with Muslims from other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, he has not completely devoted his life to Christ. He explained:

> I promised my family I would only be in America for a couple of years and then I would go back to them. It has now been over a decade. Because I did not keep my word, and I am not with them in person to include them in such a monumental decision, it would be immoral for me to make a decision in America to become a Christian. I would need to wait until I return.

"Because I am not with them in person to include them in such a monumental decision, it would be immoral for me to make a decision in America to become a Christian."

Hybridity and Multiple Homogeneous Units

The weakened HUs of unreached people groups in cities slow the spread of the gospel. Global urban migrants are busy, have diminished allegiance to their people, and negotiate several identities. They belong to multiple HUs, some stronger than others, that vie for their attention and time. They often intermarry with other peoples, creating more hybridity and renegotiated identity. At various stages in life, members of UPGs might identify with, and be influenced by, particular social HUs more than the UPGs to which they belong. If there are Christians among those social HUs, a great opportunity exists to share Christ.

For Kadijata, almost all her time in France was spent with French business professionals, as well as immigrant business professionals who were not from Guinea. She came to Christ through a Cambodian-French co-worker. Even though Kadijata shared Jesus with her family members, her disconnection from the larger Fulbe Futa community lessened the influence of her conversion on her people. Conversions that take place through social HUs disconnected from the larger UPG will not likely result in immediate missiological breakthrough of new bodies of believers that can incorporate members of UPGs. Nevertheless, these social HUs do create more opportunity for beachheads of individuals turning to Christ who can potentially convert core members of their UPGs to form churches.

The broadening and softening of people group identity coupled with the multiplicity of HUs in cities means that broader people group identities might be better described as overlapping conglomerations of HUs that are linked enough to have an overarching common identity. For example, people from Pakistan who live in North American cities usually choose to identify as Pakistani to the larger society. The broad category marker of Pakistani, however, encompasses many different HUs that overlap like condensed Venn diagrams to constitute the whole. These HUs consist of groups such as muppies (Muslim yuppies), stay at home moms, Balochi-speaking taxi drivers, Pathan-speaking Islamic fundamentalists, Karachiites, second generation students, IT professional workers, mipsters (Muslim hipsters), working class apartment dwellers, etc. If a 25-year-old, second generation, Pakistani muppie woman came to Christ, she could overlap a Balochi HU by being from a Balochi family, which could overlap with a Balochi-speaking taxi driver HU, which could overlap with a general Pakistani taxi driver HU, which could overlap with a Pathan-speaking Islamic fundamentalist HU, and so on, but the influence diminishes with each HU jump. Due to the broader people group identities and social fragmentation in cities, a wide range of lifestyles and values are represented in UPGs that present social barriers for the spread of the gospel. The overlapping of HUs, however, means that the gospel can spread more quickly to other HUs because the HU borders are more porous and inclusive.

The myriad of HUs make contextualization efforts difficult for missionaries. Cross-cultural contextualization efforts are difficult enough when working with highly homogeneous monocultural ethnolinguistic people groups. The complexity of urbanites demands even more astute ethnographic research from missionaries. For effective evangelism and church planting, missionaries will likely need to focus contextualization on particular population segments, paying special attention to the receptivity of those HUs and their influence on other HUs throughout the UPG. Missionaries might find as much success, however, in finding receptive groups, or individuals, and simply supporting those people in creating their own indigenous expressions of Christian faith in obedience to Scripture through their existing networks. Those networks will jump in and out of the UPG and will likely end up with varied expressions of church and incorporability with the broader UPG.

The multiplicity of ethnic identity and HUs among urbanized UPGs also creates an opportunity for the multiethnic church to play a key role in seeing first fruits among UPGs. People like Kadijata would be open to different types of churches at different stages of their lives. At the time Kadijata became a Christian, it would have been difficult for her to incorporate into a Fulbe Futa church because of her preferred HUs at the time and the hurt she felt toward her people. She was

most comfortable in a multiethnic church. McIntosh and McMahan point out that first and second generation immigrants have various stages of life where they are more or less likely to explore multiethnic churches. For instance, one-and-a-half and second generation immigrants [23] are most likely to be attracted to multiethnic churches during their formulative adult years but prefer a church connected with their traditional cultural values when they have children.[24] Missionaries in cities should be open to varied forms of church models, understanding that different models will be more effective at various stages in incorporating members of UPGs.

Multiethnic churches can be safe places for members of UPGs to explore Christian community. If they are never able to experience Christian community, it is difficult for them to imagine making a decision that could result in losing their lifelong community. Without the scrutiny of their people watching, members of UPGs feel a sense of anonymity in attending multiethnic churches and forming relationships with Christians. McGavran recognized

> *that* if in a conglomerate (mixed member) church, a person is present from a people segment that does not have the gospel, they can become a "bridge of God" to take the Good News to their own people.[25]

Multiethnic churches and general city ministries should recognize their unique opportunity to disciple and spread vision for members of UPGs to reach back as bridges of God to their people. Missionaries focused on reaching UPGs in cities should be aware of this fact and widely network with multiethnic churches. They should recognize, however, that for many UPGs there will be no such bridge. The missionary family that connected with Kadijata in New York City with a vision to reach West African Muslims did so through a general city ministry.

There are several difficulties in multiethnic church involvement with members of UPGs. Members of UPGs have unique sets of discipleship issues related to persecution, family relations, spiritual warfare, etc. that many churches will not know how to address. As one Muslim-background Christian told me, "I went to a church for ten years, but they never even knew the questions I was asking." As great and necessary as multiethnic churches are in cities, most of them are fairly monocultural and disciple people of a particular worldview. It is impossible for one church to adequately disciple people from myriads of cultural, religious, and familial backgrounds. For that reason, homogeneous churches are necessary to effectively evangelize and disciple UPGs.

When a first generation UPG immigrant is discipled in a multiethnic church, they are rarely discipled in their heart language, and they resultantly struggle to communicate the gospel with their people in a way that can be understood, received, and reproduced. One day I was on the subway speaking Bambara to a Malian Muslim. When the Malian man exited, a gentleman from Cote d'Ivoire approached me and spoke in Jula, a closely related language. I was amazed when the man explained that he was an evangelist and pastor. A Jula-speaking evangelist was a rare find! When we began talking about our faith, however, the man switched to French. When I switched to Bambara, he switched back to French. Finally, he said, "I'm sorry. I wish I could talk about God in my language, but I only know how to talk about God and the Bible in French." Such a phenomenon is not an anomaly. It took Kadijata over 25 years to begin praying, reading the Bible, and sharing her faith in her first language of Pular. If Christian members of UPGs in multiethnic churches are going to be used as bridges of God to their people, they will most likely need to do so in their language.

We have also found that our most effective cross-cultural missionaries in North American cities are those that speak the language of their UPG, not necessarily because of the droves of people they lead to Christ, but because they effectively understand culture enough to enhance the work of same and near culture believers from UPGs. Similarly, in a study of best practices among Muslim ministries in North America, the likelihood of an evangelist seeing a convert was eight times higher if they were using a language other than English.[26]

As one Muslim-background Christian told me, "I went to a church for ten years, but they never even knew the questions I was asking."

The Desire for Unity

One of the greatest critiques of the homogeneous unit principle (HUP) is that it does not adequately confront the moral and ethnic biases of HUs, which exacerbates disunity within the global church.[27] Ralph Winter addressed this critique, saying:

> [I] freely admit that this strategy may unintentionally make it appear that we are setting aside goals of unity for goals of evangelism. This in fact is not the case. It is quite the opposite: we are willing to do evangelism in the world as it is, in the highly divided world in which we live, believing wholeheartedly that in the long run the working of the Holy Spirit through true evangelism is the only way to melt down the high walls of prejudice and thus produce true unity.[28]

Under the banner of unity, some urban churches could actually be preventing HU UPGs from beginning their journey with Christ. One charter member of a large urban church confessed to me, "We thought we would start this city-focused church that would reach influencers and trickle down to all peoples of the city. But we've realized we haven't touched UPGs." In an effort to be a church "for all," they effectively excluded members of UPGs who would need a more focused HU approach. Another large urban church shut down a booth with materials for Muslims who wandered into their services because they wanted to be a united church that didn't display a separation of peoples. In effect, they cut off opportunities for Muslims to join the Body of Christ. In the name of unity, if Kadijata was required to reconcile the bitterness toward her people prior to coming to Christ, she would have likely balked. Instead, through her transformation in Christ, she has learned to love and embrace her people despite the pain she has experienced from them.

> ## "We thought we would start this city-focused church that would reach influencers and trickle down to all peoples of the city. But we've realized we haven't touched UPGs."

The Influence of Host Culture

The host culture of global urban migrants, nationally and locally, can positively or negatively influence UPG receptivity to the gospel and influence their worldview. The greatest hindrance to members of UPGs finding Jesus in New York City might simply be busyness. Many of them work sixty plus hours a week and have long commutes. One Malian man told me he moved to the city with his best friend, but they only see each other once a month due to conflicting schedules. If best friends only see each other sporadically, what implications does that have for evangelism, discipleship, and church planting? Kadijata grew in her faith because she was devoted to Christ and her church family. At great sacrifice in the midst of her busy schedule, she made long commutes twice a week to church.

Materialism is another negative influence on UPGs from the host culture. UPGs primarily move to places like New York for money, and the city only feeds that desire. Many West African friends work two to three jobs to build up wealth in the city and their homeland. One friend admitted, "I cannot talk about anything in English except for money and selling things. What does this show about what's important to me?" The Bible is clear: "No one can serve two masters . . . you cannot serve God and money" (Matt. 6:24, ESV).

Even though there are thousands of churches in a city like New York, these churches could be barriers to the gospel instead of bridges for some people. One Fulani man in the Bronx said to me:

> Can you explain something? I see all of these churches around here, but I don't understand. Women who go into the church do not have much clothes on, and when they go in, they dance and sing. This is not religion. This is *discothèque*.

For this man, his experience with urban churches created extra barriers to the gospel.

For some global urban migrants from UPGs, the North American culture positively impacts their receptivity to the gospel. Some of them come from oppressive backgrounds in which the freedom to make individual choices is suppressed. Perhaps they were curious about the Bible back home but reading it was too risky. Upon arrival in North America, they have societal freedom and the ability to hide under the city's cloak to explore divergent belief systems. The most striking difference in Muslim ministry in North America compared to the Muslim world is the proportion of women becoming Christian. In the Muslim world, most of the first churches are filled with men, and if their wives convert it is often out of loyalty to their husbands instead of conviction of truth. The men might not even consider their wives important enough to hear a gospel message. North America provides social support for women, and they are empowered to more freely make their own choices. In conversations with Muslim ministry network leaders in North America, they have confirmed my observation that seventy percent of the Muslim-background people who become followers of Christ in North America are women.

Conclusion

Unreached people groups remain. Their foundational worldviews are slow to change, even in the midst of the onslaught of new ideas, experiences, and relationships that occur through technology and migration. Missionaries' understanding of ethnicity, contextualization, and overall missions strategy, however, will need to evolve alongside the complex identities of global urban migrants from UPGs. Forms, structures, models, communication channels, ways of transmission and reproduction, etc. are rapidly changing, and on-the-ground mission strategies will need to involve deeper understanding of hybrid identities and multiple homogeneous units within UPGs. The social fragmentation of urbanites might slow the spread of the gospel, but it also creates opportunities for life-changing information to jump easily from one HU to another. Multiple types of ministries and churches will be needed to penetrate the breadth of UPGs in cities. Many ministries will need to focus on UPGs, and some ministries

will pick up fringe members of UPGs who can be "bridges of God" back to their people. In New York City, Kadijata worships with a large, multiethnic church, is part of a church of missionaries focused on reaching Muslims, has regular prayer with women ministering among West African Muslims, has Bible studies with homeless people and drug addicts, connects with a French-speaking West African church, networks with churches and ministries who focus on reaching the neighborhood where she does ministry, participates in prayer times with Fulbe Futa Christians from across the globe, and is seeking to start a Fulbe Futa church. Welcome to a new era of reaching unreached peoples in, and through, cities. **IJFM**

Endnotes

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[23] We are defining a first generation immigrant as someone born in another country who migrates as an adult. A one-and-a-half generation immigrant is someone born in another country who migrates as a child or young adult and, therefore, has a worldview shaped by the country of their parents as well as the new country into which they integrate linguistically and culturally especially within the school system. A second generation immigrant is someone born in the country to which their parents migrated.

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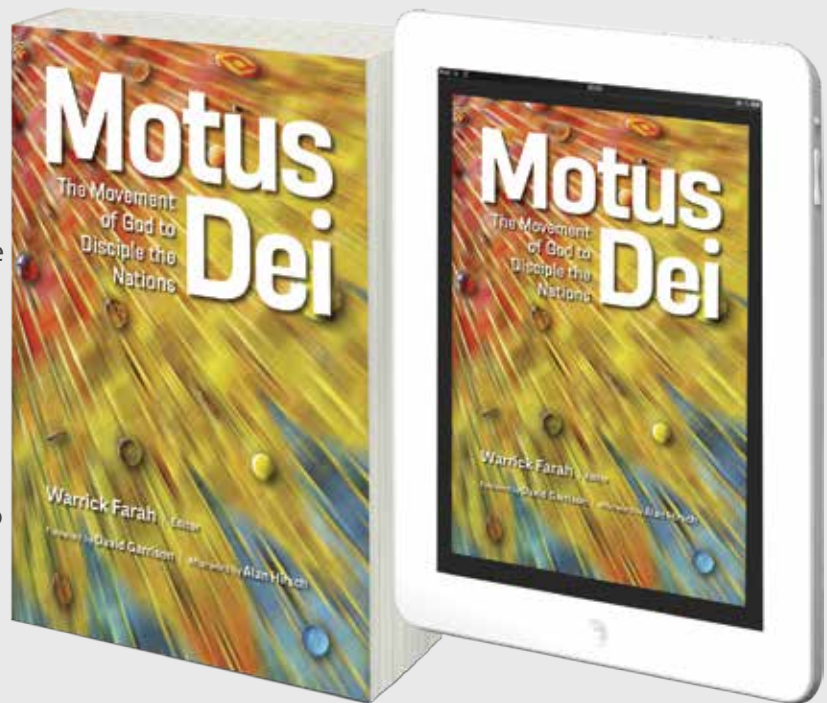
The Homophilous Unit Paradox:
Church Planting Movements Within and Beyond the Oikos

by Warrick Farah

Warrick Farah serves with One Collective as a missiologist and theological educator. He is editor of Motus Dei *(2021) as well as co-editor of* Margins of Islam *(2018). His research interests include Muslim Studies, Frontier Missiology, Integral Mission, and Church Planting Movements. Warrick is a facilitator of the Motus Dei Network (https://MotusDei.Network) and a researcher at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.*

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from a lecture given at the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship, March 3–5, 2022.

At a fundamental level, the discipline of frontier missiology is based on "crossing difference:" dissimilarities between peoples are significant enough to require an intentional apostolic effort to engage such peoples. By contrast, much of contemporary missiology is based on "uniting difference:" distinctions between peoples are harmful to the unity of Church and a pastoral response requires the ministry of reconciliation. In this regard, Donald McGavran's infamous Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) serves as an inflection point between frontier missiology and contemporary missiology. The apparent contradiction lies between an apostolic function and a pastoral function, both of which are needed, but at different times and in different ways. Phenomenologically, church planting movements (CPMs) highlight this tension. In this lecture, after presenting three short case studies introducing CPM's intersection with the HUP, I'll share what I've discovered specifically as it relates to the nature of church multiplication within networked *oikos* churches. Along the way, I'll make two proposals: 1) that "homophilous" is a more appropriate term than "homogeneous," and 2) the HUP is better understood as a "paradox" and not a "principle."

Vignette 1: The Hararghe Oromo in Ethiopia and People Blindness

Our first story comes from Ethiopia. I interviewed an Ethiopian missiologist who researched the Hararghe Oromo people a number of years ago. This is a least-reached Muslim people group of more than seven million people with their own language and customs. Evangelical Amharic-speaking churches were geographically prevalent among the Oromo. However, only 300 believers from the Hararghe Oromo attended these Amharic churches. To join the church, they had to change their dress, language, and culture in order to assimilate. As a result of this research, ministries were launched to specifically engage the Hararghe Oromo and encourage their own expression of Church. Today, there are several streams of movements and several organizations working within the

Hararghe Oromo, but this movement only started *after* the Amharic churches and organizations became aware of them. As has been said, *you cannot reach what you do not see.*

A similar case exists in Lebanon. Lebanese Sunni Arabs represent a population of around 1.5 million. After 150 years of evangelical ministry, there are only a few hundred known believers from a Lebanese Sunni background. There are probably hundreds of other cases like this across the world, an example of what Ralph Winter famously called "people blindness" and why frontier missiology involves crossing difference. This vignette also illustrates the axiom: *Every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results it is getting.*

Vignette 2: Former Drug Dealers as "Units" Reaching Islands in Southeast Asia

Wimba was a college student who was arrested for selling drugs in order to pay for his studies. A local movement catalyst met him during his prison ministry, and their mentoring relationship lasted around three months. When they met, they discussed heart transformation, inner healing, and studied the Bible. On the third week, Wimba came to faith in Christ, and he was able to form a group in the jail to discuss what he was learning. After studying Acts 13, Wimba and the catalyst began to talk about how to reach other islands. Wimba went back to his island after getting out of prison, but unfortunately, Wimba and the catalyst lost contact with each other for about one year.

When they had reestablished contact, the catalyst learned that Wimba had been busy ministering to other drug dealers with whom he had previously worked. He didn't have any other mentors, so he just used what had been modeled to him by the catalyst. Wimba went to prisons and began to find other drug dealers; he also studied inner healing and heart transformation with them while encouraging those who came to faith to start new groups. In his first three months, Wimba led twelve people to the Lord and began to disciple them. Out of the twelve, eight became fruitful and were able to form between three to five groups each. At the time of the case study, there were five new islands with discipleship groups on them.

After reflecting on this story, the catalyst, who was himself a Southeast Asian with a missiological degree, said:

> When we start a movement, we need to stay with people from the same profession. In this case, former drug dealers, but in other cases, people from the same families or the

same people groups. These people make better groups that can reproduce, and then, we still have many islands who can be reached if we are committed to moving across boundaries.

Vignette 3: The Listening Movement and Inter-caste Communion in India

Our final vignette is from a mission partnership between the Walkers, an American couple, and Sanjay, an Indian movement catalyst from a Christian background. They refer to it as "The Listening Movement" because they listen to God speak through the Bible. Starting since 2011, churches have consistently multiplied beyond the fourth generation in many places. In a few locations, it has reached more than twenty generations. It has now spread to six geographical regions, multiple languages, and multiple religious backgrounds. Only a handful of churches use special buildings or rented spaces: nearly all are micro-churches meeting in a home, a courtyard, or under a tree.

As in all movements, issues arise that must be addressed. A few years ago, Sanjay discovered that some churches in The Listening Movement were not taking communion in their worship service. The leaders explained, "It is difficult to take the Lord's Supper across caste lines." With advice from the Walkers, Sanjay did a series of discovery Bible studies with the leaders about obedience and unity in Christ. Finally, after listening to the Bible together, these leaders came to the conclusion that, "If I am in Jesus, I am no longer a Brahman or whatever caste I was born into. I can either be a Brahman or in Jesus, but I cannot be both. If that's the option, then I want to be in Jesus."

After declaring that they wanted to be in Jesus, the leaders did something seldom seen in their context. They apologized in front of each other without attempting to save face or defend themselves. They admitted, "I'm sorry. I was wrong," both to Sanjay and to their disciples. After apologizing, the leaders intentionally gathered multiple churches with mixed-caste background people, starting the practice of communion together.

The CPM Origin Story

These vignettes point to the interesting relationship between the HUP and CPM today. In addressing this complicated relationship, we've already heard a lot in these presentations about the HUP, so let me talk specifically about CPM which appears to be a wide phenomenon in the world today, mostly occurring in Muslim and Hindu contexts among the least reached. I'm happy to point you to *Motus Dei*[1] which is a recent volume of research-based missiology on this subject. CPM is not simply

Only 300 believers attended these Amharic churches because they had to change their dress, language, and culture.

an expatriate missionary conversation. Most movements, as much as eighty to ninety percent, are started by other near-culture movements.[2] CPM is now part of our understanding of the maturation of World Christianity.

Understanding the origin story of CPM will help us see its relationship to the HUP. The story starts in the early twentieth century with Roland Allen. Allen, building off the work of people like Rufus Anderson, Henry Venn, and John Nevius, further developed the famous "three-self" formula, emphasizing the indigeneity of local churches. Advancing the conversation, Donald McGavran popularized the understanding of "people movements" and the significance that social ties play in multi-individual conversions. Of course, he built off Waskom Pickett as well.

Then, Ralph Winter at Lausanne '74 and his work with the *Perspectives* curriculum focused the conversation on the unreached and church multiplication. And so, the ideas of indigeneity, social networks, unreached, and multiplication laid the missiological foundation for CPM. The first time I saw this term CPM used was actually in the book *DAWN (Discipling a Whole Nation) 2000* published in the late '80s.[3] When CPM was used, it was connected with the US Center for World Mission (now Frontier Ventures), although Winter himself noted that he did not like the phrase CPM when he reviewed David Garrison's book by that title.[4]

> ## CPM is not simply an expatriate missionary conversation—eighty to ninety percent, are started by other near-culture movements.

A missiology of church planting movements finds its origins in the twilight of the Church Growth Movement. In the 1990s, David Garrison led two different focus groups with other "strategy coordinators" serving in least-reached peoples. Using multiple whiteboards, they discussed the movements that had been happening, and with the noted commonalities between them, Garrison published a booklet in 1999 entitled *Church Planting Movements (CPM).* It was so popular that they translated it into more than forty languages. And then five years later, as the numbers of church planting movements continued to grow, it was expanded into a book published by the same title.[5] So in the early 2000s we begin to see church planting movements become a more widely understood or recognized phenomenon in missions discourse.[6]

Church planting movements were originally defined as a "rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweep through a people group or population segment."[7] This is itself a curious phrase seemingly related to the HUP, a "population segment." Garrison also described ten universals found in all CPMs—from prayer and evangelism all the way to rapid reproduction and healthy churches. The conversation on CPM has continued to evolve, but, regarding the HUP, the baseline idea of a movement happening within a "population segment" seems to have remained.

People Movements and Church Planting Movements

Initially, many believed that CPM was simply a continuation of McGavran's "people movements" concept. However, CPMs are best viewed as a specific type of people movement and the two terms are not interchangeable. For instance, McGavran's "people movements" focused on the decision-making processes of multi-individual conversions in culturally homogeneous contexts. In contrast, CPM focuses on the end result, which is a multiplication of indigenous churches. Also, McGavran argued for a harvest principle to responsive peoples, but in contrast, CPMs focus on non-Christian contexts regardless of any perceived receptivity. Finally, "people movements" missiology was developed during the incredible expansion of Christianity in the twentieth century, documenting a *conversion to Christianity*, whereas CPMs are more intentional about *discipleship* and seem to be less related to structures and institutions related to Christendom or traditional Christianity.

There are also a number of related missiological conversations over this time frame that should not be confused with the CPM story. For instance, we need to distinguish the missional church, insider movements, World Christian revitalization movements, and house church movements. These, of course, have some overlap with CPMs, but they're substantially different conversations. These other phenomena are not talking about the generational, multiplicative, and movemental aspect of church reproduction that you see in CPM.

The HUP in CPM? Primary and Secondary Sources of Data

Definitionally, the phenomenology of CPM is a moving target: there are movement engagements, emerging movements, growing movements, and established movements. Importantly, CPMs are about generational growth, where the churches reproduce, unlike a "saturation model" or a "cell church" model where there's a strong centralized institution that establishes individual churches which may or may not reproduce on their own. Instead, CPM's focus is on reproduction and on

generational growth. The research I did for this article comes from established CPMs where there are consistent fourth-generation churches in multiple streams.

Similar to all discourses, criticism of CPM missiology exists. It has been criticized for theological pragmatism, rejection of cultural Christian traditions, a focus on rapidity, and for a "primitivist" ecclesiology. I believe there are helpful responses to these objections (which sometimes stem from misunderstandings). I refer you to *Motus Dei*, especially to chapter three.[8] But my concern is not in offering an apologetic for the CPM discourse, but rather an investigation into what is really happening at the ground level of these movements regarding the HUP. Good qualitative research asks, "What is going on behind what is going on?" I aim to follow the data where it leads.

For this article, I conducted seventeen interviews and e-mail exchanges with movement practitioners. I visited four movements in two countries in South Asia and performed numerous focus groups on this subject. I also read more than forty contemporary case studies of CPMs in different contexts.

Since CPM is a such a large phenomenon, I must reiterate that I'm not a spokesperson for these movements. I'm also not an apologist for CPM or disciple making movements (DMMs). My bias would tend to be pro-movement (and I am not really *anti-* other approaches!), but I'm also critical of certain popular level presentations of movements missiology. As a researcher looking at this issue phenomenologically, I am committed to a "hermeneutic of suspicion." This value reflects one of the reasons we established the Motus Dei Network for the missiological study of global movements to Christ.[9]

Against a (Mis)Understanding of the HUP?

Let's get to the data. When I asked movement practitioners and missiologists about the HUP, one of the first things I discovered was confusion about the concept itself. It would seem that there's still some significant misunderstanding concerning the HUP, even as some people reported that they were against it. For example, one interviewee said this:

> The fact that we now have large movements in 35 ethnic groups and movement starts in another 35 ethnic groups would argue that the homogeneous unit principle does not hold in movements.

In theory, the HUP states that movements tend to propagate within people groups. This quote might make sense if he had said "we have *one* movement that has united or transcended

thirty-five ethnic groups," but that's not what he said. Instead, there were multiple movements in these people groups.

Let's look at this apparent misunderstanding of the HUP in a second salient quote:

> Movements are not looking to HUP. The target people group on which disciple-makers normally focus is a huge group like an ethnolinguistic group or even larger, i.e. the Horn of Africa. The vision includes everyone in that larger group. People do naturally reach the people they know and hang out with, but in many cases, the movements also spread to those who are quite different.

This interviewee conceptualizes the HUP into a narrow definition. But notice how he does also speak about ethnolinguistic groups, and "the people they know and hang out with," which is still within the basic idea of the HUP. My point from these two quotes is to note the difficulty people have understanding the HUP. This definitional confusion adds an important layer of nuance and might explain either the support for the HUP or the opposition to it with movement thinkers when asked about it directly.

Pro-HUP

While clear understandings of the HUP were elusive for some, there were many movement practitioners I interviewed who were clearly pro-HUP. This was explicit in some interviews, implicit in the written case studies, and evidenced in the actual movements themselves. For example:

> [We see] . . . the spread of a movement within the social or cultural unit, whether that is seen in terms of ethnicity, class or something else. Many movements tend to spread through existing social networks: particularly kinship, friendship groups (which may often be shared interest groups), neighborhood or work contacts, and classmates in an educational setting (being a possible subset of either work or friendship).

This understanding of the HUP correctly assumes that the "homogeneous unit" is an affinity group, not simply an ethnic group. A common theme in other interviews also appears in this salient quote above: "Movements tend to spread through existing social networks." Kinship and friendship groups often facilitate the dissemination of a moving faith—this is an observable reality.

India and Caste Systems

I did not find evidence of sustained CPMs being intra-caste (different CPMs or other types of missiological movements in India may in fact be intra-caste). Instead, the inter-caste feature is connected to what we observed in Vignette 3 and

Good qualitative research asks, "What is going on behind what is going on?"
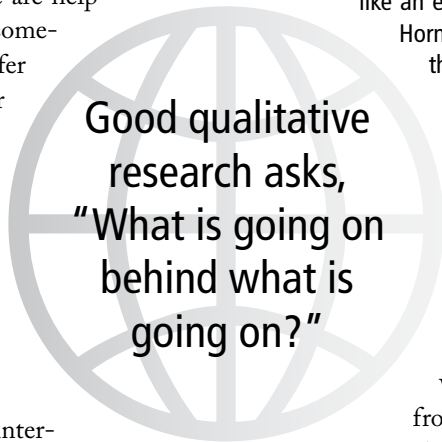
the additional case studies I examined in India. By the time churches have reproduced through four generations, movements have typically jumped across caste lines or into adjacent social networks. One Indian movement catalyst said something very interesting on this point:

> Buddhism is a strong philosophy, but it did not survive in India because Buddha came to abolish the caste system and ignored it. I think that the caste system is evil, but I'm not here to abolish the caste system. I want Christ to abolish it. So, we don't promote those caste-based churches.

Later in the interview, he theologized that Paul did not try to abolish slavery, but neither did Paul allow the slavery distinction to exist in the church (cf. Gal. 3:28). According to this Indian catalyst, this is how slavery eventually died out and how he similarly hopes a similar process will lead to the eventual eradication of the Hindu caste system. A training mnemonic used in this movement was: *There is only one caste; male and female.* Some movements or approaches to church planting may attempt to preserve Indian caste structures, but, in general, I did not see this evidenced in the CPMs I investigated.

However, I did notice as well that Brahmins (high caste) tended to assume leadership or be thrust into leadership roles much more readily than lower castes (there is also generally less progress among the higher castes). In CPMs, house churches do aim to bring people of different castes together and address casteism. However, this process can be time-consuming and doesn't always yield immediate results. In the movements I looked at in India, most people come to faith through experiences of divine healing and deliverance, which then leads to the formation of a church within their extended family. As one catalyst expressed, "I don't feel content until I've met with the entire family."

A Contextual and Situational Understanding of the Oikos

This leads to the bulk of where the data points, and that is to the oikos—the family. One experienced catalyst offered this insightful quote which was descriptive of many of the case studies I examined:

> The importance of the HUP and movements is simply how new believers within a UPG see themselves in their oikos. Initially, it is almost always the communication of their new faith within their intelligible oikos, thus HUP in nature. However, as they grow in discipleship, they must and do invariably see that they are part of a much larger network of all of God's creation. And those from that broad creation who do not know Jesus are in need of the gospel as well.

In other words, though not initially, these disciples of Jesus eventually branch out into other ethnolinguistic groups, valuing the relational and networked nature of all of humanity.

Local believers have their own agency to define, however they see fit, what constitutes someone as "other." This was a continuing theme: movements start within a contextually situated oikos, but *as movements* they don't stay there. There is often a strong impulse to multiply and to share Christ with those in their immediate circles and beyond. One Indian CPM catalyst told me that his "mantra" in training new disciples was this: *First, reach your family. Then, disciple all the nations.*

In the movements I looked at in India, most people come to faith through divine healing and deliverance, which then leads to the formation of a church within their extended family.

The Urban-Rural Nuance

I also heard significant insights regarding how the HUP interacts with movements, particularly when comparing urban and rural settings. The majority of CPMs happening today are in rural contexts, in what Paul Heibert referred to a "peasant" worldview[10] and more often involve microchurches. CPMs tend to be constrained by two factors: complex societies and institutional or "high church" ecclesiologies (see figure 1 on page 74). Regarding the latter, I'm talking about the pastor-centric model, "the buildings, bodies, budgets" or spectator model of church.

Although movements are not as frequent in urban contexts, they are indeed occurring in cities.[11] Urban movements are more within towns or enclaves, and not throughout large metropolitan cities. But in cities where they are still happening, the oikos or affinity group tends to be with those who are younger and more educated (and individualistic), and so the oikos is much more ethnically diverse and the boundaries of the oikos are even less defined or discrete.

Related to this also is the fact that there are very few movements happening today in the thirty-four Western industrialized democracies of the world. CPM was an innovation in the 1990s intended for least-reached contexts in the Global South, so we are not surprised to see them more frequently in those settings. It would seem then that much missiological translation needs to occur for movements to be catalyzed in the Global North, although there is still much to be researched on this topic.[12]

Figure 1. The Common Environments for Contemporary CPMs
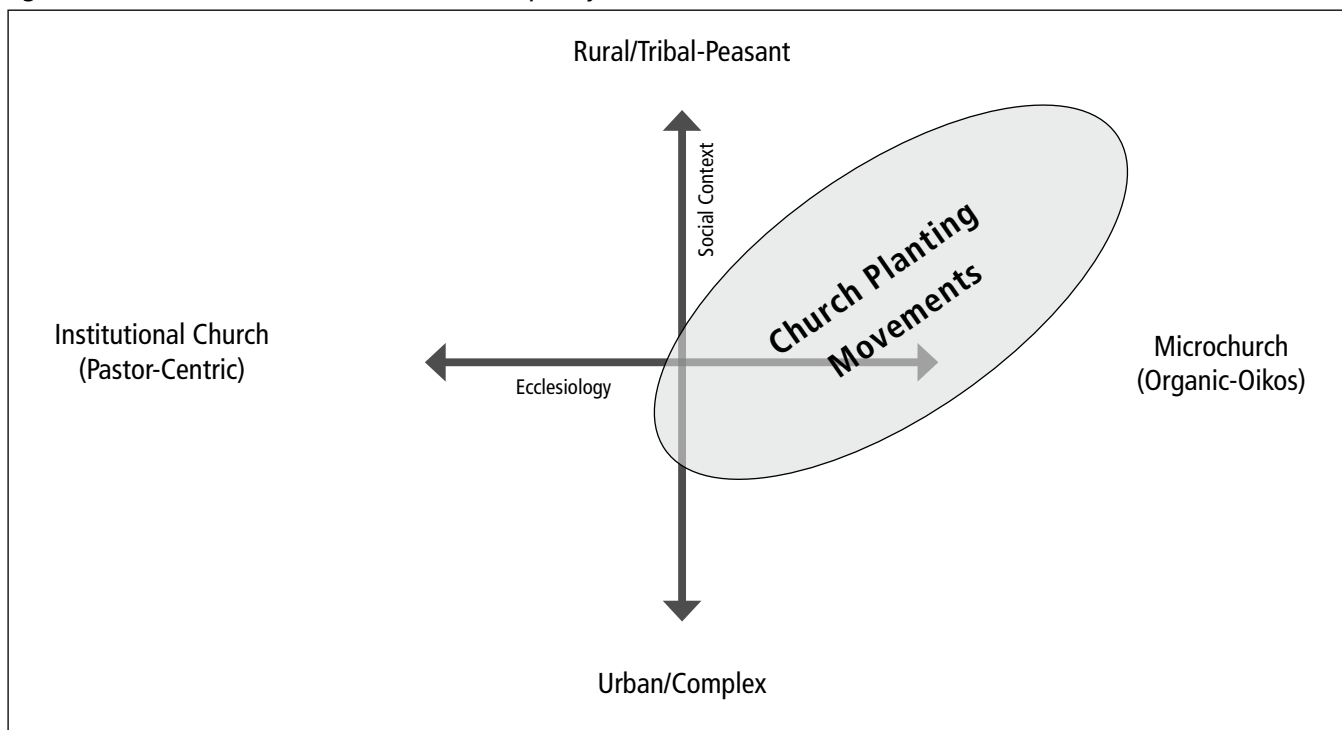
Greater Diversity at Higher Levels of Leadership

Within the organizational structures of movements, leaders usually oversee a network of small churches. Key leaders are involved with multiple networks, and their ecclesiology is relationally networked together. While the oikos might be more or less "homogeneous" since families are involved, higher levels of movement leadership reflect more diversity. This ethnic diversity of leaders is similar to what we see in Acts 13. In this passage, which speaks of unity in diversity, the Gentile church was born out of the diaspora Jews (not those from Jerusalem), who were sharing the gospel with Gentiles. Acts 11:20 points out that unnamed Jewish disciples, "men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also." Acts 13:1 refers to the leadership of the network of house churches at Antioch: it was comprised of a significant diaspora population. These "third culture" people are usually more adept at integration. They are more proficient in living with multiple identities and their relational networks are broader. Therefore, the boundaries of their oikos are more fluid and less discrete.

Rediscovering the Oikos

In a post-industrialized society, we tend to think of ecclesiology as a "voluntary society." But when we force the New Testament into our member-spectator-institutional model of church, then we commit both eisegesis and an anachronistic fallacy. Even when we envision large groups of Christians at Rome or Antioch, we must envision a network of oikos churches.[13] The oikos is the basic unit of New Testament ecclesiology.

Therefore, the social context for catalyzing CPMs is better understood using the local understanding of the oikos rather than retaining sociocultural homogeneity. McGavran's often repeated quote, "one by one against the family," was a critique of the extractionist, mission station approach to church. In that sense, the HUP helps guard against Western individualistic ecclesiologies. However, movements aim to reach the oikos within their context. Successful movement catalysts who effectively engage with whole families emphasize a direct relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This immediacy with Christ empowers "ordinary" believers for ministry and leadership, and as a result, CPM missiology places significant emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. This is not just in theory, but in practice.

The "Person of Peace" and Homophilous Networks

As previously stated, CPM approaches attempt to avoid extracting people from their oikos. When a group comes together, there is a natural inclination for them to want to expand into other groups. Some of these groups are socially adjacent, within their own extended families, but other adjacent groups might not be the same ethnically. In this sense, a subdiscipline within sociology called *Network Science* has made similar observations. But instead of "homogeneity," the word used is "homophily." In social networks, homophily (lit. *love of the same*) simply means that people with "like characteristics tend to be connected" and that "connected

people tend to have an effect on one another."[14] When "homogeneous units" can be ethnically heterogeneous, then confusion abounds. A better sociological word for this concept is homophily and not homogeneity. Homophily transcends ethnicity and includes interests, values, hobbies, etc.

The "person of peace" principle seems to match this key dimension of social network theory, where social entrepreneurs meet brokers, like evangelists who meet people of peace, who then act as bridges that fill structural holes between networks.[15] When brokers step into gaps between social networks, they're creating change and movement.[16] As "bridge people," they connect people together to facilitate the diffusion of new ideas into new networks. While the "person of peace" may or may not be a biblical principle (Matt. 10; Luke 10), it is still an observable phenomenon in movement dynamics. It's not wrong to invest time in these types of bridge-building people.

Unfortunately, the way that the "person of peace" has been discussed in movement literature has tended to be formulaic. Instead, we need a deeper look at the key biblical passages—they are not just a golden key. These passages portray gospel messengers as interdependent on the host community and that mission is not just a one-way street of "proclamation." In the sending of the disciples in Matthew 10 and Luke 10, they're to be relational. There is reciprocity.[17] They experiment and fail and move on. Properly understood, the person of peace concept is vital for seeing how and why movements spread using a relational, networked ecclesiology within homophilous units and beyond the oikos.

From the "Homogeneous Unit Principle" to the "Homophilous Unit Paradox"

Unity within diversity metaphors abound in the New Testament: we're ingrafted branches (Rom. 11), one body with many members (Rom. 12), living stones of one temple (1 Cor. 3), etc. Theologians and missiologists alike recognize the fundamental tension between unity and diversity, so I'm not claiming that my following proposal is novel.

However, entangled in this whole HUP controversy is the concept of "culture," which has an inherent duality. By nature, we are cultural beings. Like fish without water, we cannot exist without culture. Culture surrounds us, both as our palace and our prison. We rejoice in it, but we also can't escape from it. We are in the world, but we're not of the world (John 17:13–19). As Andrew Walls would say, we're pilgrims (transcending culture), but we're also indigenous (belonging to the culture). This duality creates a tension between spiritual unity and cultural plurality.

This leads to my main proposal: as we have seen, the HUP is both correct and misguided, at different times and in different ways. The CPM phenomenon reveals this most clearly. I propose that the classic understanding of the HUP needs two corrections. First, "homophilous" should replace "homogeneous." Second, to see it as a paradox and not a principle. As a statement, then it could read as follows:

The "Homophilous Unit Paradox" guards against cultural paternalism to promote polyphonic worship from all ethne and yet can also endorse racism and segregation if left unchallenged.

Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle good or bad? According to the CPM phenomenon, it can be both. Paul wanted the church to move and multiply to where it didn't yet exist. This desire meant that differences be crossed and could not have entailed a uniform church, for that would wipe out the ability for people to hear the gospel in culturally relevant ways. Frontier missiology is about crossing differences because Yahweh is no mere tribal or national deity: he should be universally worshipped. Attempting to be heterogeneous or non-homophilous *all the time* would definitely exclude people who might otherwise be interested in Jesus. It also ignores the reasons why Paul wanted to become all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22).

> ## The HUP has at times provided white evangelicals with a theological rationale to reframe their segregated churches as acts of "faithful evangelism."

However, followers of Christ exist in one unified body in spite of linguistic differences. Our fallen human nature means we all tend to be xenophobic. We will naturally stay within our own caste (people) like in vignette #3 above unless we do something to break out like in vignette #2. So, a pastoral effort is required to emphasize spiritual unity, like in Ephesians 2, while also apostolically respecting cultural plurality as in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. In the United States, the HUP has at times provided white evangelicals with a theological rationale to reframe their segregated churches as acts of "faithful evangelism."[18] Among Americans in particular, this uncomfortable truth should provide us with great caution when attempting to catalyze movements.

Renaming the Homogeneous Unit Principle to the Homophilous Unit Paradox acknowledges the complexity of these "units," which can be diverse in ethnicity and culture. The term "paradox" highlights the potential for both positive outcomes, such as encouraging indigenous worship from diverse peoples, and negative consequences, like implicitly

supporting racial discrimination and division. This modification encourages a more nuanced and critical approach to the HUP, fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between homophily and diversity in missiology.

Potential Benefits of Treating the HUP as Paradox

There are at least two potential benefits of seeing the HUP as a paradox. The first is that it encourages humility on both sides of the HUP debate. Proponents and opponents will be discouraged from dogmatic statements, neither embracing HUP as a "golden key" to movements nor denouncing it as Christianized racism that is "abominable to Christian conscience and unity."[19] Andrew Walls famously said,

> The church has seen many heresies come and go, but the earliest of them has been by far the most persistent. The essence of the Judaizing tendency is the insistence on imposing our own religious culture, our own Torah, our own circumcision.[20]

This critiques both those who say that homogeneous churches are the *only* way to be apostolically fruitful, and those who say multiethnic churches are the *only* way to be pastorally faithful.

The second benefit is that this tension in the HUP will help us see people groups as fuzzy and fluid sets. When we talk about reaching the oikos and then reaching other people groups, we have to remember that both definitions are ambiguous sets with flexible boundaries which depend, paradoxically, on the context. Treating the HUP simply as a principle doesn't seem to allow for the sociological complexity that movements encounter and demonstrate.

> # The essence of the Judaizing tendency is the insistence on imposing our own religious culture, our own Torah, our own circumcision. (Walls)

Enduring Questions for Movemental Ecclesiology

How soon do new followers of Christ from non-Christian backgrounds in emerging churches need to express the reality of Christological unity with other believers? What does genuine fellowship in Christ look like in practice, especially in a first-generation church within a least-reached people? In frontier mission contexts, how are new believers traditioned into historic Christian orthodoxy without imposing Christendom on them? Conventional church structures derived from historical Christendom are insufficient for the organic growth and culturally specific initiatives of emerging local

communities of believers in least-reached contexts. How can we make sure that these movements feel connected with all Christ-followers from all times and in all places? Perhaps these are questions we will always be wrestling with, and both apostolic and pastoral perspectives are required which shouldn't have to compete with each other, but often do.

Summary and Conclusion

1. Initially, CPMs multiply within an oikos which is contextually defined and fluid. But then they spread to other diverse groups of people, and often the main uniting feature is faith in Christ. As seen through a CPM lens, the classic understanding of HUP holds at first, but not later, as churches multiply and movements expand.

2. Apostolic ministries are required to cross differences between peoples. The Old Testament and New Testament consistently speak of groups of people and God's desire to receive worship from each of them.[21] Pushback against people group thinking—or the HUP—often wrongly assumes an essentialist, rigid, and artificial understanding of people groups. The reality is that movements often do start within an oikos, in the diverse ways that homophily is implied in that situation.

3. There is no culturally neutral church relevant for all peoples and places, so a plurality of expressions of church is required in God's diverse world. Aspects of the HUP have rightly critiqued American individualistic ecclesiologies, cultural imperialism, and missionary paternalism. "People blindness" is an ongoing problem, even in the Majority World church.

4. Unity in Christ and racial reconciliation is hard work and all too easy to avoid. The "homogeneous" or "homophilous" church is never an end to itself. The church is a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of Jesus. Insisting that churches remain homogeneous/homophilous can lead to racial discrimination. This points to the paradoxical nature of the HUP and the need for pastoral applications of Christological unity.

5. There are numerous varieties of CPMs as the phenomenon is not monolithic. Just like individual churches, some unite diversity better than others. Painting in broad strokes can lead to many unnecessary problems in missions discourse. As evidence, the decades-long debate over the HUP reveals that we need to do a better job holding competing truths together in tension.

6. Let's all say "amen!" for apostolic initiatives who catalyze new work among new peoples, "amen" for pastoral initiatives who work for unity in the Church, and "amen" to non-partisan missiology and apostolic-pastoral collaboration as we join God in the *motus Dei* to redeem all nations back to himself. **IJFM**

Endnotes

1 Farah, *Motus Dei,* 2021a.

2 Coles and Parks, "Movement Servants Needed!," 37–41.

3 Montgomery, *DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go.*

4 Garrison, *Church Planting Movements.*

5 Garrison, *Church Planting Movements.*

6 Farah, "The Genesis and Evolution of Church Planting Movements Missiology," 349–61.

7 Garrison, *Church Planting Movements,* 21.

8 Coles, "Addressing Theological and Missiological Objections to CPM/DMM," chapter 3, 37–57.

9 Farah, "The Motus Dei Network: Fostering Communal Intelligence on Movements," 39–41.

10 Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews,* 143ff.

11 Sherwin, "Observations in Urban Disciple Making Movements," https://twofoureight.org/.

12 Farah, "Movements Today: A Primer from Multiple Perspectives," 13.

13 Smither, *Mission in the Early Church,* 154.

14 Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks,* 9.

15 Burt, *Structural Holes.*

16 Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks,* 66.

17 Robinson, "Revisiting the Person of Peace," 337–48.

18 Curtis, "White Evangelicals as a 'People,'" 108–46.

19 Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom,* 213.

20 Walls, "Converts or Proselytes?," 6.

21 Datema, "The Universal Particularism of Panta Ta Ethne," 138–51.

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Elisabeth (Betsy) Wagner received her Ph.D. in Counselor Education & Supervision from the University of Arkansas, her M.A. in Community Counseling from Denver Seminary, and her B.A. in Interpersonal Communication from the University of Northern Iowa. Betsy has co-authored a book titled, *Effective Generational Ministry* with Dr. Craig Blomberg, and another with Drs. Heather & Fred Gingrich titled, *Skills for Effective Counseling*. Betsy spent over ten years in academia, and is now the Director of Member Care Services for WorldVenture in Englewood, CO. She and her husband, David, live outside Denver, CO where Betsy maintains a practice as a Licensed Professional Counselor and consultant.

Philip Jenkins

Philip Jenkins is a Distinguished Professor of History at Baylor University, where he serves in the Institute for Studies of Religion. He has published 35 sole-authored books, including *The Next Christendom: The Coming Of Global Christianity* (2002) *Climate, Catastrophe, and Faith: How Changes in Climate Drive Religious Upheaval* (2021), and *A Storm of Images: Iconoclasm and Religious Reformation in the Byzantine World* (2023). The Economist has called him "one of America's best scholars of religion."

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Bringing New Light to an Old Controversy:
Reconsidering the HUP in a Multiethnic World

by Alan McMahan

Alan McMahan, PhD, served in Indonesia and the US and has extensive experience in equipping church leaders and cross-cultural professionals. He has been active in training undergraduate and graduate students in North America, Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia in leadership development, church growth, and cross-cultural witness. He is the former President of the American Society of Church Growth and was the editor of The Great Commision Research Journal. *After years of teaching in the School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University, McMahan continues to teach the Growing and Multiplying Churches cohort in Talbot's DMin Program.*

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from a lecture given at the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship, March 3–5, 2022.

From its earliest days, the church growth movement founded by Donald McGavran had its detractors. Perhaps one of the most criticized elements of McGavran's teaching was the Homogeneous Unit Principle (commonly referred to as the HUP). The HUP was most famously stated as: "People prefer to come to Christ without crossing cultural, linguistic, or ethnic barriers." The Homogeneous Unit was broadly defined by McGavran as "a section of society in which all members have some characteristic in common."[1] The implication is that, by contrast, heterogeneous groups are those where the individuals differ from each other in age, socioeconomic status, values, education, ethnicity, etc. For the sake of simplicity, in this paper, homogeneous groups will be referred to as HM groups, and heterogeneous groups will be referenced as HT groups. Understanding the interplay between these two kinds of groups in the mission of the church will be the focus of this study.

How the Gospel Spreads: A "Highway of Social Networks"

As a missionary administrator in India in the 1930s, Donald McGavran was concerned that despite the hard work of his missionaries over many years to minister to the people through educational initiatives, health care, and better farming techniques, the growth of the church, and the reaching of the lost, languished. Despite the holistic ministry efforts that occupied a large portion of their time, year after year the number of churches and baptisms did not appreciably increase, with rare exceptions.

That all changed when McGavran met with J. Wascom Pickett, a Methodist missionary who was researching people movements in Northern India where whole regions of the country had quickly embraced the Christian message. The resulting investigation profoundly reshaped McGavran's missiological strategy and led to his formulation of the HUP. McGavran's research revealed that the gospel (along with other ideas and innovations) spread through a people group along a highway of social networks that functioned as a kind of glue,

or binding-agent that held people together. The social glue that provided the connectivity of one person to another was almost always based on a common denominator, most typically expressed as a sameness of geography (or place of origin), language, or ethnicity. In India, where McGavran served, the caste system also imposed a powerful glue that determined the social networks that were available to the individual. But as a sociological description, the HUP provided a needed clarification as to how the gospel spread. Indiscriminate seed-sowing among unreceptive people would likely lead to low evangelistic results.

Of course, widely broadcasting the seed might reveal places of receptivity not previously identified, but such practice would not represent most of the successful farmer's efforts to bring forth a fruitful harvest. This is sound missiology. While we desire to see the church planted everywhere, even when we sow seed in gospel-resistant places we are still looking for the pockets of receptivity where the gospel can first take root. The missionary role compels us to overcome the cultural, linguistic, and cultural barriers that block the spread of the gospel, but then having crossed the barrier, we are looking for the social glue, the HUP, that connects receptive people to other sociologically similar people that might also be more likely to become receptive. In this sense, the sociological *description* captured by the HUP, informs the *prescription* of how to advance the gospel among the peoples of the earth.

Is the HUP Still Relevant or Is it Harmful?

It was regarding the prescription that opponents to the HUP found their voice. Early critics of the HUP felt that such a missiological strategy was tantamount to racism. One critic, commenting on the HUP, said "it was evangelism without the gospel . . . which reduces initial Christian commitment to an inoffensive appeal avoiding the suggestion that to become a Christian one must turn from a social order that perpetuates injustice."[2] Larry McSwain called it an unbiblical heresy that represents a denial of the gospel that reconciles.[3]

How could McGavran, in good conscience, advocate that we restrict the gospel to focus only on more people who look like the believers already in the church? Especially in societies where the church tends to segregate according to race, ethnicity, language, and cultural background: doesn't such a missiological strategy only reinforce the estrangement of the various families within the body of Christ from each other? Doesn't the gospel require us to work on breaking down the barriers of separation that divide believers (Eph. 2:14)? And in a
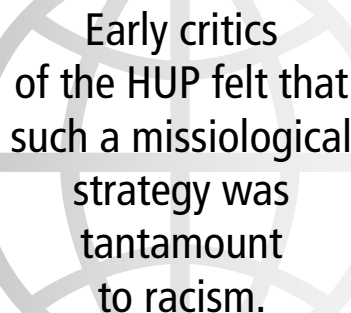
world that is becoming increasingly multiethnic through the impact of the combined effects of urbanization, international migration, and globalization,[4] doesn't the HUP seem to be increasingly out of step with the realities of modern living? So, how do we evaluate the HUP as a missiological strategy after its first introduction by McGavran more than fifty years ago? Is it still relevant? Or going beyond that, is it actually harmful?

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Clearly tensions exist around this topic. One could get the sense even between Donald McGavran and Ralph Winter that they were going in different directions. McGavran, using the HUP, would advise mission agencies to send most of their workers to fields with high receptivity to win the winnable while they were receptive. Winter constantly made the case for sending missionaries to the unreached peoples of the earth where receptivity had historically been low but among whom there was no church.

Which of these approaches should represent our preferred strategy? And how should we think about this in our world that is increasingly multiethnic and racially polarized? This paper will make the case that both approaches are needed and should be held in a kind of creative tension. Both approaches contain truth that the church needs to hear.

The classic definition of an unreached people group (UPG) emphasizes the attributes of a people's geographical location, ethnicity, language, and culture as the most significant binding agents that hold a people together. People group thinking has thus dominated evangelical missions strategy in the last several decades. It informed the DAWN Movement (Discipling a Whole Nation) strategy in the Philippines and elsewhere.[5] It was central to the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement.[6] It continues to play a dominant role in Finishing the Task (FTT),[7] now led by Rick Warren. In FTT, the goal is to focus on the 4 B's: 1) Bibles, to be made available in every heart language, 2) Believers, that every believer would be equipped to share his faith personally so that the entire world may hear the gospel, 3) <u>Bodies</u> of Christ, to sponsor and plant a daughter church where there is no church, and 4) Breakthrough Prayer, to have every person who doesn't know Jesus prayed for by someone who does—all four goals to be accomplished by the year 2033. These are all significant efforts built around the people group concept.

However, McGavran's broadening of the *homogeneous unit* went beyond geography, ethnicity, language, and culture to consider attributes such as a people's socioeconomic status, region of birth, educational level, age, gender, occupational

interests, musical and artistic preferences, hobbies, and affinities. This complex array of common interests can function as different kinds of glue that hold together disparate people who might not normally form a social network. For example, the global urban youth movement's fascination with pop music and hip hop creates a common language and set of values that extends beyond one's language, or culture of origin. Nevertheless, these affinity groups act as powerful binding agents to connect people.

However, anyone who has dived deeply into the demographic information on an urban population that is available through a government-sponsored census, or in a wide number of marketing companies, knows the number of variables reported on can be mind-numbing. Making sense of this data as it relates to a particular church's outreach strategy is intimidating and often unhelpful. To understand the real-world implications of community demographics for your business, church, or mission, the data needs to be clumped or grouped into typical profiles of people that make up your target audience. To help in this effort, social scientists utilize psychographics to help an organization envision the types of people who make up the neighborhood. Psychographics is the study of values, behavior, and lifestyles of persons included in a demographic profile.[8] One application of this that I have observed described my wife's hometown of Morgantown, West Virginia, as being a university town largely populated with two kinds of people, often referred to by the phrase "Town and Gown." The Town people represent the year-round locals who work in the professional, commercial, and service sectors. Then there are the Gown people who are mostly students and faculty of the university whose population changes dramatically based on whether the school is in session, or not. Each of these groups need each other but are very different in their values and lifestyles. The Gown people tend to be single, 18-24 in age, with limited incomes or highly educated, underpaid professionals—but both of these types of singles have a preference for prestige products beyond their apparent means. Each of these two psychographic groups, the Town and the Gown, provide a useful frame for clustering people together into somewhat homogeneous groups. And these groupings help in predicting values and lifestyle preferences as well as the kinds of social networks they maintain. Understanding these groups can help ministry agencies know better how to approach, reach, and disciple these peoples.

Who Are You Trying to Reach?

So, who are the people your church or mission agency is trying to reach? When I ask pastors this question I tend to hear, "We are trying to reach everyone in this community. We invite all to be a part of our fellowship." But that simply is not

true. Churches may have the theology that all are welcomed, and they may intend to be open and accepting to all types of people, but the simple truth is that they aren't really friendly to everyone. Walk into a sanctuary on a Sunday morning and the kind of people that church is reaching will be on full display. A quick look will make it clear the typical age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class of the people the church is actually reaching. What is most telling is who that church is not reaching. Absent are the people who don't speak the language used in the church, or whose skin color may be different, or who do not fit with the socioeconomic class of most of the population.

So, the church (or mission agency) tends to function as a radio station that broadcasts a message to the community. They use a particular language, musical style, ministry structure, architectural style, message content, and communication medium to reach the population. The members of the audience that have their "radios" tuned to that frequency will hopefully hear a message that makes sense to them or meets their need. But if the broadcast frequency does not match the frequency to which they have the dial, then the message sounds foreign or filled with static and no effective, positive communication is made. The church might think they are welcoming all types of people—but that is not true.

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Broadcasting on Multiple Frequencies

On one trip to Saddleback Church, I saw they were hosting the Sunday worship service in multiple venues using different worship styles: traditional (with hymnbooks), a contemporary Boomer service, a Gen X service with electric guitars and drums, a service featuring an urban gospel choir, and a Hawaiian service, all running simultaneously, and all built around Rick Warren's sermon coming in by video from the main worship center. All these represented contextualized ministry approaches aimed at different homogeneous groups, all with the goal of lowering cultural barriers so as to proclaim the gospel as good news to diverse groups of people. So, the larger the church (and the more widely competent the staff), the more a church can broadcast on multiple frequencies. But no church, no matter the size, is capable of broadcasting on all frequencies. No church speaks all

languages. There is not enough time, specialization, or energy to do that. So as frustrating as this might be, no church can reach all people, and we are unintentionally keeping out others.

The truth of the matter is that most churches and mission agencies use homogeneous groups to reach certain groups of people. If a church has a youth pastor, they are appointing a specialist who knows how to speak "youth" to connect with a homogeneous group. The topics addressed, the clothing styles, musical preferences, and communication styles all need to be shaped to reach young people.

Even urban churches in heterogeneous neighborhoods that are intentionally striving to be a multiethnic church use homogeneous groups. A number of churches I know in Southern California, that have deliberately moved toward being multiethnic churches, have opened up Spanish language services for those who don't have English skills strong enough to enjoy the larger English language multiethnic service in the main auditorium. Another church in Flushing, Queens, New York that I have visited operates a multiethnic church with separate English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Spanish worship services. The pastor of each congregation is on the church board and pastoral team. They use both homogeneous (HM) and heterogeneous (HT) ministries with the goal of reaching many types of people in the neighborhood.

Looking through a Contextualization Lens

Another way to think about the use of homogeneous groups (HM) is to consider it from the perspective of contextualization. Contextualization narrows the bandwidth of a message to be more relevant to a particular group. Tim Keller says:

> There is no one, single way to express the Christian faith that is universal for everyone in all cultures. As soon as you express the gospel you are unavoidably doing it in a way that is more understandable and accessible for people in some cultures and less so for others . . . Preachers must choose some particular illustrations and concepts that will inevitably be more meaningful to some cultural groups than others. We need to stretch as much as we can to be as inclusive as possible. But we must also be aware of our limits. We should not live in the illusion that we can share the gospel so as to make it all things to all people at once.[9]

The vocabulary we use, the way we argue a point, the humor we include, will naturally be a better fit for some groups over others. The message needs to be relevant to the homogeneous groups to whom we are speaking while still preserving the integrity of the gospel message.

At the same time, churches and mission agencies have a mandate to take the gospel to all nations and that will necessitate a holy discontent for limiting gospel proclamation to the receptive people within reached people groups and social networks.

In rural areas, this usually requires the physical relocation of the evangelist and deliberate efforts to cross cultural boundaries. However, in heterogeneous contexts such as high-density urban and multicultural environments, "the nations" might be present as your next-door neighbor, your work associate, or your friend in your sports club. So, the urban evangelist needs to be able to find new homogeneous connectors in heterogeneous locations.

While heterogeneous environments are stimulating (in the city there is always an interesting restaurant or cultural festival around the corner), urbanites have a need to find (or create) homogeneous connections where they can belong to a group that has some attributes in common. These homogeneous connections help reduce the infinite complexity of the city into some known groups where the stranger can become a trusted friend. So even in heterogeneous, pluralistic contexts, threads or pockets of homogeneity emerge to meet important needs of the urban dweller. If your interest is early English literature, raising reptiles, a snake-lovers club, a bicycling club, hip hop music, or something else, you can find a homogeneous group or network that can feed your common interest and give you a place to belong.

McGavran classified social networks into four types:[10]

1. geographical (or neighborhood) networks
2. kinship networks
3. professional networks (people in the same occupation)
4. affinity networks (usually arranged around music or art preferences, hobbies, and other kinds of special interest groups).

Greenway and Monsma suggests there may be a fifth group of "fellow believers" where people of faith gather in their various religious groups.[11] The first two of these networks are more dominant in rural areas while the last two types of networks are more influential in cities and multiethnic spaces but these networks serve as the avenues along which influential ideas flow.

> "As soon as you express the gospel you are unavoidably doing it in a way that is more understandable and accessible for people in some cultures and less so for others." (Keller)

Recognizing how homogeneous groups appear and operate within heterogeneous contexts is important for ministry effectiveness. It is also important for the church to move out of its homogeneous units to engage in the wider, much more diverse population. That is the missionary mandate.

HUP Characteristics and Outcomes

These reflections lead us to some broad observations. First, as was noted earlier, the HUP is first, and foremost, descriptive. Like it or not, it does describe common human behavior of how people form their identity and cluster around a common set of values or characteristics. This has been happening from the beginning of human history. Secondly, homogeneous and heterogeneous groups are not moral categories in and of themselves, though in spirited public debate they are often framed as such. Instead, it is more helpful to understand how they are descriptive of how people gather and form their identity. Thirdly, nearly all churches and communities have a mix of HM and HT groups, even in multiethnic contexts. A deeper investigation into the composition of most any group will demonstrate this truth. Fourthly, there is a tendency for larger groups (churches, communities, and urban contexts) to display a greater amount of heterogeneity (which is often managed by the forming of more homogeneous sub-groups or social networks). Finally, the HUP is not only descriptive but is also followed by prescriptive next steps.

Consider how this works out in a typical church. Both HM and HT groups may be utilized for different purposes. HM groups may include: youth groups, senior citizens ministries, singles groups, home Bible study groups, women's ministries, foreign language services (in Spanish or Mandarin), and English ministry services in immigrant churches. HT groups might take the form of large worship services; some mixed or multiethnic home Bible study groups; international student ministries; community outreach and service ministries (homeless shelters, food pantries, 12-step groups, city clean-up campaigns); mission trips; inner-city partnerships with other churches; and a daughter church reaching a different kind of people than the mother church can, etc.

In using different kinds of groups (HM and HT) to reach different kinds of people and for different purposes, the church (or mission agency) is able to be as specific as necessary to meet the needs of certain clusters of people who have something in common (an HM group), while also mobilizing their people to engage the greater diversity of others who also need to be reached. Often the use of both kinds of groups is done intuitively by the ministry leadership in response to the needs of the congregation. However, it is also important to periodically assess the mix of ministries in the church and be more deliberate to launch the kinds of groups to either 1) meet specific needs of an HM group or 2) expand the church's outreach to a wider diversity of people (through an HT group). Finding that right balance is critical to maximize the evangelistic and discipleship opportunities.

Using a model similar to that first introduced by Carl George,[12] it would be possible to locate on a diagram all of the ministries of a church (groups that gather at least once a month). The size of the icon on the map relates to the number of people involved and the shape of the icon indicates whether it is largely an HM group (rectangle) or an HT group (triangle). Identifying all of these church meetings and their types allowed ministry leaders to assess the array of ministries in the church in terms of their ability to function as ports of entry for new people and their ability to evangelize and disciple their attendees. See figure 1.

Figure 1. Types of HM and HT Meetings in a Typical Church/ Community
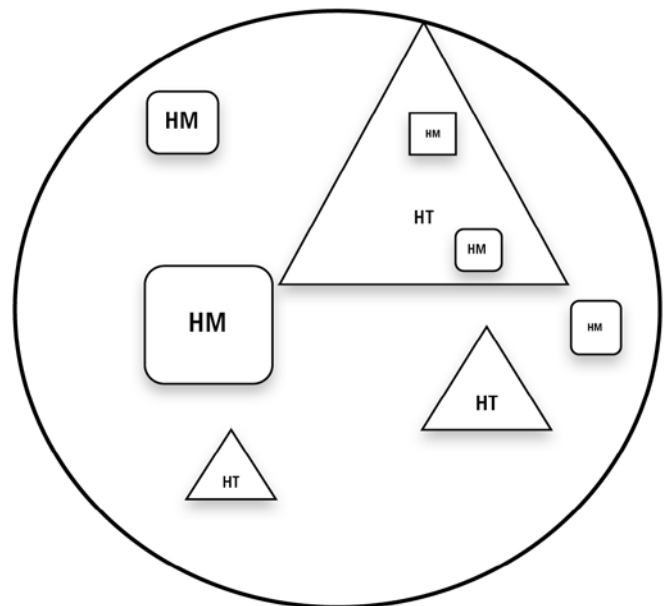
Using Wagner's typology of ministry group sizes (Celebration, Congregation, and Cell),[13] Carl George then represented the larger worship gatherings (75 people +) at the top of the chart and the smaller nurture groups and ministry teams (15 people or less) at the bottom of the chart[14] (See figure 2, on page 84). For the purposes of this paper, the groups meeting at the top of the chart would likely be more heterogeneous and the small groups at the bottom of the chart would be more homogeneous. The middle level or the Mezzanine represented fellowship groups of 15–75 people like larger classes or mixer events. These middle-level groups were typically not as good at worship as the larger celebration services, nor were they as good at discipleship as the small groups at the bottom of the chart, but they did provide a place for newcomers to be recruited into small groups. So, the advice given to the pastors was to place more emphasis on leading robust worship services and multiplying small groups but to use the congregation-sized groups on the Mezzanine level more sparingly and primarily as

"fishing ponds" to attract more people into HM or HT groups. Mezzanine level ministries are illustrated by financial planning or child-raising seminars, or other kinds of special events hosted by the church for the wider community. They are not especially good for discipleship, but they tend to attract people not normally in the orbit of the church.

Figure 2. HM and HT Meetings Sorted by Peter Wagner's "Celebration, Congregation, Cells" Typology
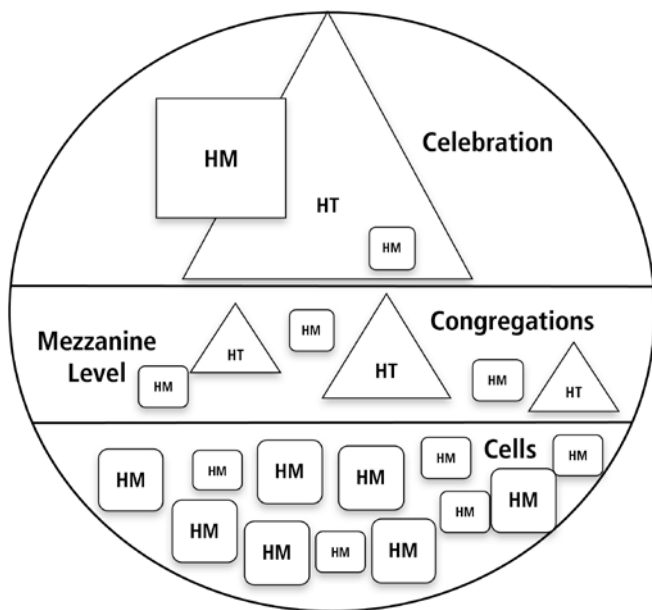
The point of these charts is to highlight their value for assessing the kinds of HT and HM ministries that might be used in a church or a mission effort into the community. It may help church or mission leaders to better visualize the mix of HT and HM ministries they deploy and how they can be used creatively to broaden the reach of the church, thus turning spectator believers into missionaries while also allowing specialized discipleship to be focused on smaller groups that have some form of commonality. The tension between these two goals is reflected in the diagram in figure 3.

Figure 3. Receptivity Potential
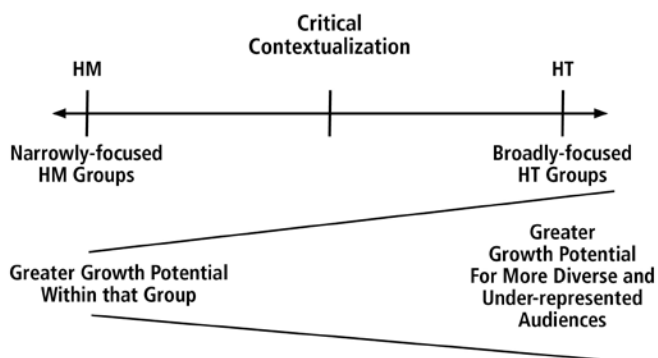
The more narrowly focused HM groups would allow for a more highly contextualized message to be delivered, which may in turn lower the cultural barriers that need to be crossed by new believers. However, in doing that they run the risk of obscuring the message for those who don't resonate with the frequency of that broadcast. On the other hand, a more broadly focused HT ministry might offer something for everyone yet not be specific enough to take them deeper into understanding how it relates to their worldview and value system.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Both Types of Groups

With that in mind it is helpful to consider both the strengths and weaknesses of HM and HT groups. The strength of HM groups is that they are more helpful to remove cultural and language barriers by offering focused contextualization. Secondly, and as a result of the first, they are more effective for evangelism and church growth. This is good missiology because it seeks to establish an indigenous expression of the Christian faith in the hearer. Thirdly, HM groups have a binding power (a kind of glue) based on the similarities that the group members have with each other. Fourthly, HM groups celebrate the originality and beauty of God's working in their people group. Perhaps it is this unique history of God's working in their midst that eventually will be expressed by those of every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne in Revelation 7:9.

HT groups tend to be more prominent in urban and multiethnic contexts and they have unique strengths. HT groups tend to overcome cultural boundaries by placing diverse peoples together in close proximity. High heterogeneity amplified by close proximity with people that are very different from each other make it more likely that the gospel will "jump" across racial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries that might normally have prevented them from communicating. Secondly, HT groups tend to be more welcoming to strangers and those that are different. Thirdly, the binding power of HT groups is based more on the differences between the participants more than their similarities. Donald McGavran in his book, *Ethnic Realities and the Church*,[15] talks about the "Urban Conglomerate" churches in India that were made up by a diverse, multiethnic, disaffected crowd whose common denominator was that they had stepped away from caste distinctions and, in some cases, kinship ties. Fourthly, HT groups celebrate the oneness that is found in the reconciling work of Christ. It is especially in the HT groups that the nations can experience the unity of the church and the healing from racial and ethnic animosity.

Clearly HM and HT groups offer strengths in different directions. But they also each have their weaknesses as well. HM groups are often unintelligible to outsiders who do not hold values in common with them. Their specific forms of contextualization may seem odd or unattractive to others. Secondly,

and as a result of the first, they can have a diminished ability to include the stranger. This may be the result of an intentional retreat into an urban ethnic enclave as often happens when an immigrant encounters the complexity of a foreign city. Or it may be the consequence of simply being too comfortable with the familiar. Thirdly, it can often degenerate into a weakness. It can lead to ethnocentrism, prejudice, exclusivism, or a kind of cultural captivity. This is clearly not God's intention as the many references in the Old Testament would indicate for the Jews to take in the alien, the marginalized, and the stranger. Fourthly, HM groups could inhibit the believers' movement towards spiritual maturity related to reconciliation and unity in Christ. Certainly, growth in Christ should also be demonstrated in the repairing of the broken horizontal relationships between humankind as well. Finally, HM groups can dull the motivations of the church to engage in missions. Certainly, church and mission agencies must keep their eyes focused on the harvest and not become too content with the inward gaze.

HT groups, of course, have weaknesses as well. First of all, as broadly welcoming as they are, HT groups can unintentionally require too much of those who are unable or unwilling to cross cultural boundaries because of fear, limitations in language, or their own personal capacity to adjust. The lack of specific contextualization to these people may be enough to where they simply will not be retained by the church. Secondly, HT churches are often dominated by the culture and preferences of the largest group. Though multiple cultures may be celebrated in the variety in the worship services and through the diversity of the staff, the various constituencies of the church often fluctuate, and even respond negatively to each other at times causing a rising and falling in majorities and shifts in the power dynamics. Thirdly, HT groups offer a great breadth of creativity and innovation but they can also be more dynamic and unstable because of ongoing change. Finally, and as a result, effective HT ministries usually require a more capable leadership to manage them. Leading worship in a way that celebrates multiple cultural groups, managing conflict constructively, leading diverse teams, and practicing good governance so that all are heard needs to be a high priority.

Effective gospel proclamation and kingdom advance would certainly become simpler if one were to just work with one model, either a ministry focused on a homogeneous group or one that is more heterogeneous. Both models have been greatly used by God. But an exclusive focus on only one or the other misses out on the rich possibilities that can emerge if the church or mission leader is equipped to use both creatively to overcome the limitations of the other. Polarizing these two kinds of ministry models against each other is not helpful, nor is it correct to proclaim one as righteous and the other as sinful as some have done with the insistence that the only biblical model is the heterogeneous one.

The interplay between homogeneous and heterogeneous groups is especially critical in urban contexts. It is in the cities that a missiological strategy focused on reaching UPG's becomes challenging. In the city, except in ethnic enclaves (homogeneous contexts), urban people do not necessarily live with or work with other people based on their language, culture, or place of origin. They may live in a vertical village with residents from all over the place, and there may even be some representatives of several UPG's living in one high-rise housing complex. Fishers of men working in this context may fish using the nets of multiethnic (HT) churches that collect many kinds of fish in one haul. The congregations of these multiethnic churches may not only contain people of varying cultures and languages but also a multitude of lifestyles, musical tastes, professions, hobbies, and special interest groups. And churches that grow large (megachurches of over 2000) may have started with a homogeneous ethnic core but became more multiethnic as their size increased. In Jakarta, Indonesia I visited a number of megachurches, most of whom had a core nucleus that contained a large number of Chinese-Indonesian believers. But in many cases, these large churches also had a significant number of other attendees who were from a wider diversity of people and among whom representatives from nearby UPGs were also present. These patterns are typical in other large cities throughout Asia and Europe.

Heterogeneous mission and church efforts have more drawing power in the city to identify and draw in the outsider, the marginalized, the rejected, the shut-out, and the locked-out.

Heterogeneous mission and church efforts tend to have more drawing power in the city to identify and draw in the outsider. Their congregations are more likely to include the marginalized, the rejected, the shut-out, and the locked-out.[16] And as these churches increase in their multiethnic representation moving from serving only one ethnicity, to two, three or four, or more they create a sufficient "blur" where so much diversity exists that adding people from even more backgrounds is hardly noticed. As mentioned earlier, these heterogeneous gatherings make it more likely that the gospel will hop across a cultural divide to reach a person who is of a different culture, mother tongue, and ethnicity.

It is at this point where HT groups, and ministries need to identify HM connectors or social networks that serve as the glue that holds an otherwise diverse HT group together. Urbanites swim, live, and work in the multiethnic soup of the city but, in most

cases, they join with, or identify with some kind of homogeneous group where they can be known, loved, and supported. Most urbanites are members of multiple homogeneous groups and they use their role and identity in each of those places to accomplish certain purposes (i.e., career advancement, lifestyle enhancement, or even as a form of rebellion against restraints placed on them in the past). If the glue is not based on culture, language, or geography of the place of origin, they will need to find it with their workmates (i.e., their professional networks), or their playmates (i.e., hobbies, special interest groups, musical preferences).

> These heterogeneous gatherings make it more likely that the gospel will hop across a cultural divide to reach a person who is of a different culture, mother tongue, and ethnicity.

The multiethnic church is one example of a heterogeneous group that more easily gathers receptive people together from a diversity of backgrounds. For some of the new urbanites their places of origin may not have permitted exploration or curiosity about new ideas. But now, in the anonymity of the city (or to a megachurch that they were invited to by a friend), they are free to encounter new truth claims.

From these large heterogeneous groups there is the possibility of gathering those with a common origin or interest into a more homogeneous sub-group where they can receive discipleship training of a more contextualized nature. The task then shifts to equipping and mobilizing these new believers to re-enter their networks of origin and take the gospel back home to their previous kinship and neighborhood networks. When the gospel comes to a UPG through the next generation rather than from a foreign face, it may be more easily accepted.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that neither homogeneous groups nor heterogeneous groups are morally wrong and they should not be polarized into opposite camps. Both kinds of groups are currently operative and necessary in almost every ministry and can be used to accomplish complimentary outcomes. Both kinds of groups have certain strengths and attendant weaknesses if they are over- or underused, but when artfully joined together in an overall missions strategy they can unlock advantages to promote the growth and health of the church. The blending of homogeneous and heterogeneous groups becomes more critical in urban contexts and in large churches, but they can be used to help a church of any size see a greater harvest. **IJFM**

Endnotes

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[14] George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future,* 1996.

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[16] See: J. Russell Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1980); and Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

Books and Missiology

The Missionary Movement from the West: A Biography from Birth to Old Age, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (SHCM), by Andrew F. Walls, edited by Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023), xxi + 295 pp.

—*Reviewed by H. L. Richard*
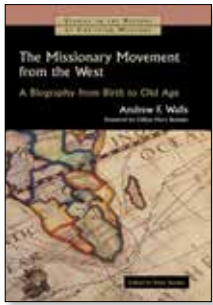
This book is posthumous, prepared from transcripts of teaching by Walls that he himself intended to bring to publication. There is evidence of the originally oral form of the material, but this is a minor matter that does not detract from the immense value of the work.

The subtitle summarizes the outline of the book, tracing the birth of the missionary movement, almost entirely the Protestant movement, from its beginnings to what is now considered to be its old age. The four section titles are worth noting and reflecting on: "Birth and Early Years: The Origins of Western Missions;" "Toward Middle Age: Western Missions in the Nineteenth Century;" "Midlife Crises: Western Missions in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries;" "Old Age: The Second World War and the Western Missionary Movement." This review will selectively highlight a few key points from each section.

The origins of mission are rooted in two central facts, stated in the subtitle to the first chapter as "Christendom and the Great European Migration." Walls gives an interesting definition of Christendom, with a succeeding obvious question: "The word 'Christendom' simply means Christianity. How did it come about that a continent [Europe] came to be called 'Christianity'?" (8). Walls answers that question by discussing how Europe became Christian. He goes on to outline two patterns of Christian expansion, the crusader and the missionary. This is insightful and inspiring material.

The Great European Migration is of course related to the colonial era, and the missionary migration to every corner of the world was in fact only one aspect of the larger migration which so often complicated and compromised (although also making possible) missionary work. "The strangest aspect" of the great migration was:

> the position of Christianity. When the great European migration began in the sixteenth century, Christianity was the religion of Europe and a largely European religion. By the end of the twentieth century, a massive recession in the West, especially in Europe, and a massive accession in the rest of the world, especially in Africa, had transformed the cultural and demographic distribution of Christianity. Christianity had become once more, as in its beginnings, a non-Western religion; and though it was by no means the only cause of the change, the missionary movement, the despised, semi-detached appendix to the great European migration, had played a significant part. I have argued elsewhere that these events are the seeds of the destruction of Christendom and the beginnings of European secularization. (17)

Three further chapters conclude the first section, focusing on the Puritan and Pietist roots of Protestant missions, the Moravians, and especially William Carey and the birth of voluntary societies as the structure for Protestant missions. British missions were born from the same streams of British society which sought radical social action, particularly Wilberforce and the anti-slavery movement illustrating this point. American missions were much more related to the colleges and universities.

The second section is again four chapters on the growth of missions into middle age and the many transitions along the way. The fifth chapter looks at eschatology and how views of the end times and mission changed. The sixth looks at Christianity and developing national churches, with insightful comments on the development and relevance of the three-self concept; "that the aim of a mission should be to produce self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches" (105).

Chapter 7 and 8 focus on Africa and China respectively. Racism, slavery and colonialism of course cast a broad shadow across African missions. Africa was the foundation for Walls' brilliant career as a missiologist but the constraints of a review preclude further discussion of this chapter. In his discussion of China, Walls focuses on three great pioneers, Robert Morrison, James Legge and Karl Ludvig Reichelt. There is so much worth commenting on and discussing related to these three men, but one statement stood out most to me. In discussing James Legge, Walls states:

> One feels that when he was talking of Confucius and trying to lead Confucians to Christ, he was aware that he was missing something. There was something that spoke to the

H. L. Richard is an independent researcher focused on the Hindu–Christian encounter. He has published numerous books and articles including studies of key figures like Narayan Vaman Tilak (Following Jesus in the Hindu Context, *Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998) and Kalagara Subba Rao* (Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ, *Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2005).*

Chinese heart. It is the immense achievement of Legge that perhaps more than any other Westerner before him he saw what that something was. He realized that translation was a two-way process. Yes, of course, the Scriptures must be translated into Chinese. Yes, of course, missionaries must learn to speak good idiomatic Chinese, pronounce it properly, not mix the dialects if they are to communicate the gospel in China. But not only must the missionary get into China and Chinese; China and Chinese must get into the missionary. This involves penetration to the heart of the central traditions of China, the consciousness at the core of the nation formed by centuries of reflection, influencing millions of people who are never aware of the source of that influence. (131)

So, Legge committed to translating the Chinese classics, which he continued for the rest of his life as a missionary and then as an Oxford professor. He described it as "absurdly unfair" to "describe Confucius as anything other than a religious teacher" (131); forcing a corollary for the present time that Hinduism or Buddhism or Islam must similarly "get into" missionaries focused in those "religious" worlds.

The four chapters of the third section begin with defining the 1840s, continuing through the second half of the nineteenth century, as the mature period of the Western mission movement. The growth of premillennial eschatology, growing understanding of "other religions," the China Inland mission of Hudson Taylor, and the growth of the Student Volunteer movement are highlighted.

Chapter 10 focuses on the great World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910.

> Nobody in the first decade of the twentieth century had any idea that the Western missionary movement was about to reach its peak and then enter into decline. . . . 1910 marks the high point of the Western movement. (154)

There were many problems with the mission movement in 1910 and Walls is predictably wise in pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the time. In the end,

> One by one, all the props of the world of 1910 have been taken away. All the assumptions on which their view of the world and of world evangelization were based lost their foundation. But the vision granted at Edinburgh, the vision of a world church, the vision of a gospel spread throughout the world—that was a true vision, and it came to pass; it really happened. But it happened in ways that no one in Edinburgh expected or predicted. (167)

Chapter 11 focuses on medical missions and particularly a case study of Dugald Christie in Manchuria. Chapter 12 is mainly on the third great World Missionary Conference held in 1938 at Tambaram on the outskirts of Madras (now Chennai) in south India. Here, in contrast to the optimism of Edinburgh 1910, "there is a sense that the world is living in the path of a rumbling volcano. The smell of lava is everywhere" (185).

The conference had been planned for China, but the Japanese invasion of China forced a late shift to India. At Edinburgh 1910 no one could foresee World War One and its massive impact on missions. At Tambaram 1938 the creeping shadows of World War Two could not be missed, but the resulting impact on the collapse of colonial empires and the rise of independent nations was beyond imagining.

The concluding four chapters of the book look at India, China, Africa and global Christianity, with many subplots interrelated with these broad themes, particularly the concept of the great reverse migration, as the great European migration ended and peoples from around the world moved to the West. Chapter 13 is provocatively titled "The Seventh Chapter of Daniel Continued: The Legacy of World War II and the Birth of the Indian Nation." Walls gives his explanation for the title:

> The point of the title is that Daniel 7 deals with the heart of our topic: that is, how the mission of God is carried out amid changing and often cataclysmic and tragic world events. For the Bible, there is no such thing as secular history. There is only history, and history is the stuff within which God works out human salvation. (198)

Walls also points out that, "It is clear throughout this story that the missionary movement is not in charge: it is carried along by events" (197).

"Not only must the missionary get into China and Chinese; China and Chinese must get into the missionary. This involves penetration to the heart of the central traditions of China." (Walls)

It should be clear by now that this book needs to be read by all who are interested in the ongoing work of Christian missions to the world. The India, China and Africa chapters will provide rich context for thinking about how mission functions. Most striking to me was the historical comment that:

> there was certainly within British missionary societies a pecking order: China got the best candidates, India got some of the best, while Africa got the celestial cannon fodder; this implicit hierarchy was operating well into the twentieth century. (214)

The Africa chapter again shows how wide of the mark Edinburgh 1910 and ongoing European conjecture were about the prospects of Christianity in that continent.

Walls makes no comment at all on the revival of mission interest in post-World War Two America, and nothing on the AD 2000 hype. (Walls did write perceptively on "The American Dimension of the Missionary Movement" in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* [Orbis Books, 1996], chapter 17.) That he considers the Western movement to be in old age suggests he was not sanguine about recent American endeavors.

The concluding chapter, "The Theological Challenge of World Christianity: New Questions and New Possibilities," includes near the end a brief, three-paragraph section on "Christian Encounters with Islam." This almost seems an afterthought in the book, but it is a deeply stimulating analysis.

> One of the fundamental issues for missions in our contemporary world is surely the interface with Islam. This is a complex and many-sided matter; there is not a single interface with a single Islam but many different situations with different dynamics. Nevertheless, speaking very loosely, one may say that for a period of 1,400 years Muslims have not heard the gospel in any way that can profit them. They have heard the *words* of Christians, but they have not heard the gospel in those words because of what they think they know Christians are saying. . . . The stories of individual Muslim converts, wrenched out of their societies, are often tragic, indeed heartbreaking. If Muslims are to hear the gospel, it will surely not be one by one but by movements within the *ummah*, or community, and occasionally this happens. (243, italics original)

In contrast to the optimism of Edinburgh 1910, "there is a sense that the world is living in the path of a rumbling volcano. The smell of lava is everywhere."

This review will close with Walls' final reflection on the encounter with Islam and movements within the *ummah:*

> Perhaps we should remember and pray accordingly that the mission of God is not tied to the mission of the church, that we may yet see other movements whereby Christ becomes known in other faiths. (243)

May God make it so!

Cultural Gaps: Benjamin Robinson's Experience with Hindu Traditions, edited by H. L. Richard (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2020), xxxiv, 242 pp.

—*Reviewed by Timothy Shultz*
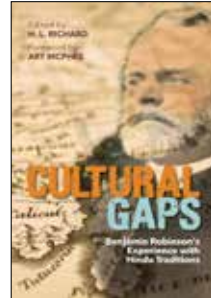
I am very happy that H. L. Richard took on the task of publishing *Cultural Gaps*. It is more accurate to say that he is editing and re-publishing *In the Brahmans' Holy Land: A Record of Service in the Mysore* by Benjamin Robinson, a 19th century British missionary and educator in southern Karnataka, India. This was the original title of the book, which is Robinson's autobiography of his remarkable and controversial missionary journeys and study of sacred Hindu texts among the Hindu villages of southern Karnataka in the 1880s. It was first published in 1912, the year before Robinson's death.

Richard deftly edits Robinson's work, so it becomes more than just another biased story of Great Century missionary heroism. He does not change the narrative, but he adds a great deal of historical context and nuance in the introduction and appendices. In these very helpful additions to the original publication, Richard summarizes many of Robinson's missiological views and supplies enlightening 19th century missions context to many of them. Richard's explanations of the key issues which Robinson struggled with, namely missionary lifestyle and cultural adaptation, add a lot of depth to the narrative of Robinson's life. In line with his desire to give Robinson's autobiography the best treatment possible, Richard also added 134 footnotes! They give the book several additional layers of missiological value. Many thanks to Richard for digging in archives for these details; they alone are worth the price of the book. Reading all of this along with Robinson's moving narrative is a bit like overhearing two missionaries quietly discuss what "Missions, Inc." doesn't know but needs to learn. By the end of the book, the reader discovers that H. L. Richard and Benjamin Robinson have chosen sides—they are on the side of Hindu people.

Richard also included an afterword in which he shares why Robinson speaks to him so deeply. This kind of personal transparency is uncommon because it is risky, but Richard seems to have grasped the fact that an analysis of Robinson's challenging missionary life demands an emotional, even vulnerable response.

Timothy Shultz has been a missionary evangelist among Hindu communities since 1985. His work includes church planting, creating Hindu friendly gospel content, mentoring missionaries and managing an online community of devotion to Jesus in South Asia called Muktimarga. Tim is married to Melanie. They have three adult children and two grandchildren.

In the introduction, Richard makes a startling claim that the life of Benjamin Robinson is a living witness to the failure of Christianity to take root in deep levels of the human vastness of Asian societies.

> Seeds toward understanding the failure of Christianity in Asia are in this book. On the fringes of the great Asian civilizational/religious traditions, and on the ruins of the destructive Cultural Revolution in China, Christianity has taken root; but Christianity primarily remains alien to Asian traditions. In India, few have wrestled deeply with Hindu traditions and what good news means in that complex world, again with an exception for the fringes where tribal and Dalit peoples have embraced Christianity. (xiv)

This is a sweeping statement that is obviously controversial. Instead of offending us, it should motivate us to read this book in order to see what Robinson (and Richard) have to offer. This is not a speculative, extracted missiological critique meant to draw a response from other mission scholars, nor is it a callous "othering" of Asian Christian communities. Richard's motives are clarified by his summary of what we can learn from Robinson's humility, process of transformation, and exploration of borderlands of interreligious engagement (xvii–xviii). Richard's critique is an expression of grief from a missionary who spent a lifetime in India, a lament for the long, difficult history of missions in Asia.

In chapter 1, Robinson begins to tell his story by explaining how separated he felt from the Kannadiga Hindus among whom he lived. Robinson was troubled by this state of affairs because he felt it negatively impacted his gospel ministry. He began to try and bridge the cultural gaps by asking a Hindu teacher if it was possible for him to join their religious community. The teacher said that was possible after a period of learning and testing, but he was adamant that Robinson could never join their caste, or *jati*. In other words, Robinson would have to live with the unwelcome fact that he would never be fully accepted into their society. Caste was a great "gulf" (much more than just a cultural gap) that existed between himself and the local people (5). Of course, Robinson asked this question as a means to learn about how the Hindus conceived of religious conversion. He was not seriously considering conversion himself.

Another set of issues that contributed to Robinson's sense of isolation from Hindu communities was his identity with and tacit participation in the British rule of India. Robinson saw real hypocrisy between the words and deeds of Jesus whom he represented and the nature of colonial rule in British India. Although Robinson was very sensitive to the feelings of the missionary community, many of whom he respected, he was also convinced that missionaries had made some very bad cultural choices such as killing cows, wearing leather shoes or belts and the eating of beef. Every missionary knew that this was abhorrent to Hindu people, but they rationalized their behavior and did it anyway. Robinson felt that this alignment with British culture in contradistinction to Hindu culture contributed greatly to the widespread rejection of the Christian gospel. Robinson felt the pain of this and wanted to make changes (xxiii).

Robinson sums up the personal impact of these difficulties in the form of a searching question, which he called the question of his life, "Could I by any wise means get near to the heart of my brothers, so that one's life might help them feel the meaning of a common Father's love" (6)? This question is what motivated Robinson to transcend the missionary narratives that shaped the thinking of his day and really face reality.

Both the missionary community and the Hindu communities had very mixed feelings about his attempts to identify with Hindu people.

He decided to take concrete steps to identify with the Hindu people. After receiving permission from missionary leadership, he took about a year to gradually adopt the dress and food of the local people. This amounted to wearing typical cotton shirts and sandals without leather and abstaining from meat (8). This was his first step toward identification with Hindu people.

These adjustments seemed to work out well, so Robinson decided to continue to follow them during a period of itinerant evangelistic ministry among Hindu villages. Robinson knew that wearing Indian clothing and eating basic vegetarian food during an evangelism tour was a controversial choice within the missionary community, but his feelings regarding this decision represent the very best examples of the true missionary spirit. Robinson wanted to emulate the admirable, sacrificial faithfulness of the early missionaries as well as expand the preaching of the gospel to the unreached. It is obvious that Robinson's movement away from the common mission wisdom of the day did not mean that he despised missionaries. He wanted to follow in their footsteps and serve the Lord among Hindu people. This nuanced thinking about the frequent differences that one may see between the ministry of individual missionaries of the global missions enterprise is still relevant today.

In chapter 2, Robinson summarized this first period of itinerant evangelism. "We then arranged a tour of about six weeks, through villages away from the main roads where missionary or evangelist seldom went" (12). In keeping with his decision to identify with the Hindu people, Robinson did not take all the accoutrements normally used by missionaries when they traveled. He wore the classic Indian *dhoti* and sandals, although he eventually learned to walk barefoot all day. He retained a bullock cart to meet him at various points along the way with a few necessities. These consisted of a small tent and some books. He also carried several vessels for water and cooking and hired a young orphan boy to accompany him and cook simple vegetarian meals. Both the missionary community and the Hindu communities had very mixed feelings about his attempts to identify with Hindu people.

As he began learning the sacred literature of the Hindu people among whom he lived, Robinson was appalled at his own ignorance.

His journey was physically demanding. It eventually became physically devastating. The heat and exposure to the elements burned but eventually tanned his British skin. The exclusive diet of simple vegetarian food was lower on protein, higher in starch and spicier than he was normally accustomed to. It is obvious that he was malnourished. Furthermore, he was struggling to digest the food he was given "the internal organs did not grow accustomed to the food, . . . will conquered feeling, however, and I ate—how I know not . . ." (13). The physical toil of walking many miles each day when his body was in full revolt to the situation is hard to imagine. What he physically endured during this six to seven week period of time seems to have contributed to the illnesses that plagued him for the rest of his life. Incredibly, Robinson retained the presence of mind and emotional stability to interact with people and even share the gospel during this time.

Robinson experienced unprecedented access to Hindu people during this grueling itinerant ministry. His identification with Hindu dress and food certainly contributed to that. This access gave Robinson opportunities to learn about the culture of the people that he would never have had otherwise. He learned about food and caste, family life, economics, and

marriage customs. He also shared the gospel with people on their own ground. He was met with either interest or disdain:

> Many asked questions about our religious teaching which showed earnest thought and a desire to learn. Again and again, we were asked why we had never brought such word before and when we would come again. Sometimes we were treated rudely, sometimes shown, plainly but politely, that we were not wanted. (15)

This was the pattern of response throughout the six to seven weeks of his itinerant journey. There were always open people. There were always closed people. Chapter 2 is full of wonderful stories about his gospel encounters.

When Robinson finished this ministry and returned to the mission compound, he was exhausted, ill, depressed, and confused.[1] At first, he was overwhelmed by what he had experienced, and simply couldn't process it all. He needed time to physically heal and recover his strength. Over time, he came to certain conclusions and could "face the results of my experiments with food and dress" (23). The questions that needed sorting revolved around issues of identity and caste. It became clear to Robinson that identity was fixed by birth into a given caste and was impossible to change. Furthermore, any attempt to adjust one's lifestyle, such as dress, in order to identify with a certain caste (personal identity) was foolish and confusing.[2] Robinson decided to limit his quest to identify with Hindu people to adopting a vegetarian diet (8–9, 26).

At this point, he also decided to focus on learning the sacred literature of the Hindu people among whom he lived. As he began to look into doing this, Robinson was appalled at his ignorance.

> How little I knew of their inward thought, it's heights and depths! My ignorance of their sacred scripture appalled me. I was most deeply ashamed that I had ever attempted to teach. I could no longer be content with second-hand presentations of their thought . . . Putting myself into the spiritual position of the people, I would thus teach them the life of Christ's love. (29)

So Robinson began a serious immersion into Hindu scripture. He focused his study on ancient Kannada and Sanskrit. As he read their scriptures, he would speak with Brahmans and visit places that were holy to them. This proved to be a very effective way to enter into the spirit of the culture, which was his passion. He hoped that this would enable him to effectively represent the interests of Jesus Christ among the people, especially high caste people, such as Brahmans. Although his quest to identify with Hindus without regard to strict caste restrictions had been shown to be idealistic, his study of their scriptures gave him what may have been an even better approach. He was learning to understand Hindu culture and people and, eventually, to develop real empathy

with them. He even ventured on writing a small booklet in Kannada, using vocabulary and concepts he had learned in his study to introduce the gospel (35).

Chapters 4 and 5 contain numerous accounts of Robinson's growing ability to enter into real dialogue with high caste Hindu people. This did not mean that most people were ready to be discipled, but he was learning to explain the gospel and his way of life as a missionary. On many occasions, he was rebuked for his study, especially his reading of the holy Vedas. At other times, Brahmans would frankly discuss matters of his religion and theirs. Throughout this book, Robinson provides numerous examples of people who were open to hear the gospel and those who were not.

I could not help but notice Robinson's reactions to various occasions when Hindus responded to the gospel. Robinson himself tells stories of being presented with what could only be interpreted as clear evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to high caste Hindus.[3] But he did not seem to see these opportunities. Robinson also came across four people who loved Jesus but were not baptized as Christians.[4] One of these people was a Brahman *sastri,* or scripture reader, whom everyone recognized as an influential disciple maker among his own people. He never converted to Christianity or was baptized. This is what is often today referred to as a Jesus *bhakta* or Hindus being devoted to Jesus apart from Christian conversion. Robinson had not yet developed a clear category for these kinds of people (62).

What if those few Hindu lovers of Jesus had developed whole new patterns of discipleship to Jesus?

The final chapter narrates how Robinson's ministry in India ended. Like so many European or North American missionaries of the day, his health broke down, forcing him to return to his native England to try and recover. Robinson was devastated:

> The doctor said I was suffering from neurasthenia and hepatitis and ordered me home. I pleaded for my work, broken in the midst, and begged that something might be tried where I was. But they spoke very decisively, "No, home or . . ." (56)

Back home, Robinson endured three years of physical, mental, and emotional breakdown, "For three years I lay in utter powerlessness with pain that knew no ease . . . I would awake, teaching or preaching in Kannada, or shuddering

with frightful dreams" (57). Eventually, Robinson began to recover and then spent seven years doing pastoral work in the Scottish countryside. It was during this time that he wrote his autobiography. He yearned to return to Karnataka but died in Scotland in 1913.

There is a deep melancholy on nearly every page of *Cultural Gaps.* It is almost sacramental in its tone and emphasis. Beyond this, however, the book is permeated with a disquieting sense of failure. Robinson thought he failed, the missionary community also thought he failed, many Hindu people thought he failed, and H. L. Richard thinks he failed. Richard points out that the distribution of his book failed as well—almost no one read it (xxxi). Is failure the correct take away from Robinson's life? To me, it is indisputable that any idea of Robinson personally being a failure would certainly find its source in the Accuser. H. L. Richard would certainly not say Robinson was a *personal* failure. He even felt the need to apologize to Robinson as a son does to his beloved father when he realizes that his father is not perfect (xxxi). How do we assess Robinson's missionary service? How do we understand success in any form of ministry?

Frankly, I do not believe that Robinson's missionary service was a failure. His own account of events demonstrates that the trajectory of his ministry was rising toward increasing local impact. This would certainly have translated into wide influence. He was succeeding, but he simply ran out of time. One could certainly say that he contributed to this by his extreme lifestyle, but many missionaries who recreated their western lifestyle as much as they could were also forced to leave India due to poor health. Indeed, many died.

Richard addresses the issues of how to assess the ministry of Benjamin Robinson. He asks a series of "what if" questions which put the life of Benjamin Robinson in a much clearer light than the false binary of success or failure:

> What if Robinson had been a bit more cautious and did not shatter his health? What if the missionary movement as a whole had (or still might yet learn to have) as much respect for Hindu traditions and the task of sharing Christ with Hindus as Robinson demonstrated? What if those few Hindu lovers of Jesus had been encouraged to develop whole new patterns of discipleship to Jesus? (xviii)

"What if" questions have value if they contribute to learning. There is much to learn from Richard's treatment of Robinson's autobiography. It is required reading for anyone serving the gospel among Hindus, especially in South Asia. Robinson was an educator and a gospel pathfinder. He was a pioneer missionary in every sense of that historically lofty title. He would be pleased by the learning that results from his life.

The modern missions movement has always valued rough-edged activists who are recruited in their thousands to go somewhere and do something. We often do as much harm as good because we don't take the time to learn. In this era of limited availability for western missionaries to minister in the non-Christian world, investing our time to learn has become more valuable than ever. You have no time to waste—learn! This alone is a reason why Benjamin Robinson's story will always be relevant.

Benjamin Robinson has the last word on the meaning and value of his ministry. He puts his feelings this way:

> Was it worthwhile to live and labor thus and suffer while doing so? If measured by gain or health then it is all loss. But if we measure by wine poured forth not by the wine drank, if the cross of our Savior be the symbol of the Spirit that is evolving goodness in the race of man, it was the loss that is alone gain. (58)

In other words, the effort people put forth to follow Jesus into the world is of infinite value to God. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] H. L. Richard's comments and footnote 130 on pages 62–63 are rightly critical of the entire concept of itinerant evangelism as it was carried out in India at that time.

[2] In footnote 83, Richard brilliantly summarizes the issue of caste and gospel witness in a much more comprehensive, empowering way:

> . . . the goal of transcending caste by avoiding its "sectional entanglements" [a stated longing of Robinson] is not even possible; those who attempt such avoidance only become yet another caste!

The alternate perspective is that the gospel must take root among all peoples which means among all languages and castes and tribes. The universality that Robinson brings into focus does not suggest uniformity but radical adaptability. The universal gospel when planted into higher caste Hindu society will bring transformation in an organic way quite different in method and result from attempts to force change from outside. Caste has always been changing and has changed drastically from what Robinson described.

[3] There were several people who were hospitable to Robinson during his grueling itinerant journey, but on pages 19–20 he was presented with a real opportunity to explain the gospel to Hindu people. On page 41, he tells the story about giving a group of Brahmans a Sanskrit New Testament. They received it and told Robinson they needed a guru to teach them. Robinson felt badly that there was no one to do it and left!

[4] On page 16, Robinson met two elderly men who had developed habits of Christian worship but were not Christians. They simply needed to be wisely discipled toward devotion to Jesus. On page 25, Robinson described a Brahman who identified as a Wesleyan Hindu. He clearly was devoted to Jesus but could not convert and be baptized. On page 39, a grieving father took initiative to tell Robinson that his little daughter had died and gone to Jesus as she had learned in the mission school. On page 48, Robinson describes a man who:

> was a *sastri* (i.e., one who knows the scripture as command) who had learned deep reverence for the Lord Jesus, studied the Gospels carefully, and persuaded many others to do so. Some of his caste called him *"padre"* (i.e., missionary). He did not openly become a Christian, but the influence he exerted among his own people was remarkable.

This Sastri would have been a perfect guru for the group of open-minded Brahmans Robinson described on page 45.

Evangelicals in the Shadows of Global Conflict

In the twentieth century, a hidden chapter of the Cold War unfolded in Africa, shaped by American evangelical missionaries. *Accidental Diplomats* uncovers this lesser-known story, revealing how these missionaries' quest to spread the gospel intersected with global geopolitics. Their spiritual mission had an unforeseen impact on the socio-political dynamics of the era.

This book offers a deep dive into the complex interplay of evangelical missions, African politics, and Cold War strategies. It explores the significant yet subtle role of faith in shaping international relations and cultural transformations in Congo, Ethiopia, and Kenya. The narrative brings to light key events and influential figures, unraveling the intricate web of religion and global power politics.

Accidental Diplomats is an enlightening read that challenges conventional Cold War narratives, spotlighting the often-overlooked influence of American evangelicals in shaping Africa's political landscape during this tumultuous period. Providing a unique perspective on the intersections of faith, history, and international diplomacy during the Cold War, this book will be a valuable resource for scholars and lay readers alike.

ACCIDENTAL DIPLOMATS

American Missionaries and the Cold War in Africa

PHILIP DOW
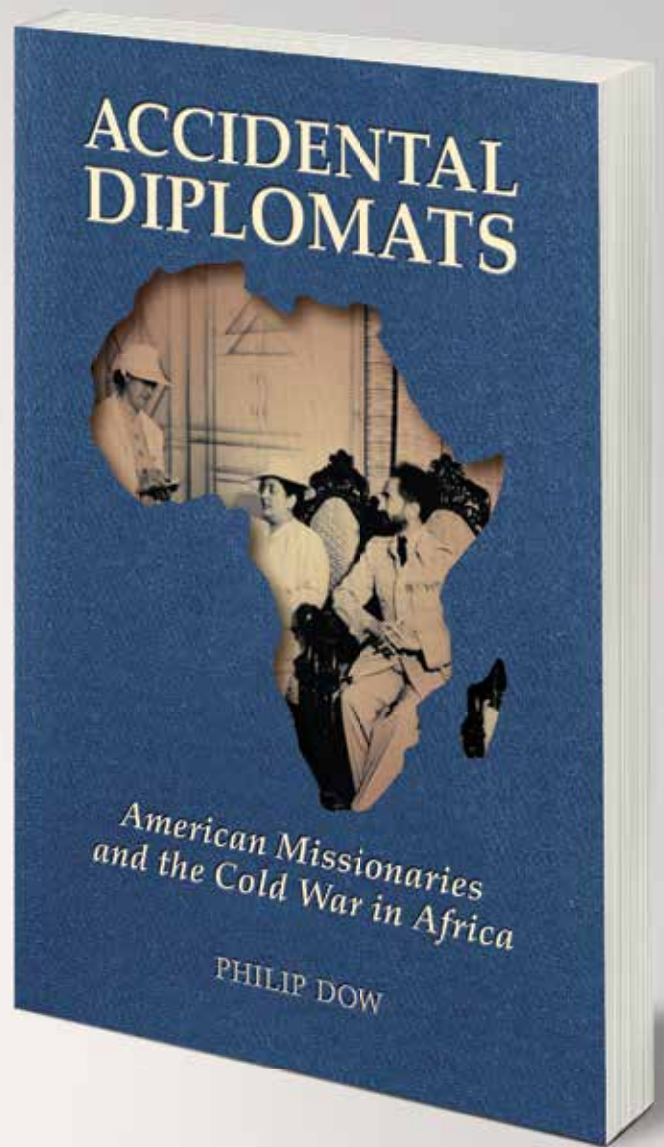
> After World War II, America's political and diplomatic engagement with Africa grew dramatically in response to decolonization and the Cold War competition with the Soviet Union. American missionaries were instrumental in building ties and deepening relations between important communities on the African continent and the grassroots evangelical community in United States. *Accidental Diplomats* tells the captivating story of how ordinary Americans played an extraordinary role in enhancing the nation's diplomatic and political presence throughout Africa. Thoroughly researched and clearly written, there is much that students of American foreign policy can learn from Dow's engaging new book.

WALTER RUSSELL MEAD
Global View Columnist, *The Wall Street Journal*
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Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities, Bard College

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In Others' Words

Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, podcasts, websites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase.

Geopolitical realities can impact global ministries in dramatic ways: subconscious ideologies that influence worldviews and movements, the distortion of facts with global repercussions, and the intertwining of nationalism with multiple religions (including in the West). In every mission context, those closer to the ground—believers who live or work there—will be more alert to the dynamics of these realities.

"Indian Democracy Can Now Breathe Easy"

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party has won re-election by a narrow margin, and he was sworn into power as prime minister for a third time—something which has happened only twice before, with Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. His party, the BJP, known for its divisive polarization and radical Hindutva policies, has lost its monopoly on power. This has implications for all instruments of government that have been used coercively against political opponents, not to mention the freedom that the media and the judiciary might begin to feel ("Election 2024 Results: Change Wears the Deceptive Mask of Continuity," *The Hindu,* June 04, 2024).

Two other commentaries on this election were quite perceptive. Check out the Banyan column from *The Economist* which looked at Dalit and low caste fears that affirmative action benefits known as quotas (for government jobs, education, and parliamentary seats) might be discontinued if the BJP were to win ("Why Caste Still Matters in Indian Politics," *The Economist,* June 13, 2024).

An interview by Open Doors with an Indian ministry partner was posted online just after the election. (Open Doors hosts the World Watch List ranking of countries by extreme persecution of Christians and last year India came in #11 out of 50 countries.)

> Since the BJP first came to power in 2014, religious intolerance towards Christians and Muslims has escalated significantly . . . "The attacks against Christians have been very systematic and have only increased. Pastors are imprisoned on false charges, churches are closed, and there is forced re-conversion to Hinduism." The BJP's ideology has emboldened Hindu extremist groups, leading to physical assaults, false accusations of forced conversions, and mob violence. . . . Even during the election period, violence continued unabated, particularly in regions like Manipur where extremists attacked polling booths and murdered Christians. Churches in India were heavily involved in the election and praying for its outcome. "They took this election seriously and most of them voted, praying for some kind of change." ("India's Election Results: What Christians Need to Know," Open Doors, June 10, 2024)

Sudan
Devils on Horseback Now Riding in Trucks

A civil war broke out April 15, 2023, between the two top Muslim military generals in the Sudan and their forces, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Many are saying this war is reminiscent of the horrific genocide and accompanying famine that devastated the region years ago. Close to ten million people out of 49 million are already displaced, two million of them outside of the country. Twenty years ago, ethnic-Arab fighters termed the "Janjaweed" or "devils on horseback" wreaked havoc—they "embarked on a campaign of ethnic cleansing that killed 300,000 people and drove millions from their homes." Now these atrocities are happening all over again: mass graves, massacres of civilians, sexual violence and rape.

> And this is Sudan today, where a new campaign of ethnic cleansing is underway. The devils are now riding in trucks instead of on horses. ("In Sudan a Genocide Unfolds—Again," *The Washington Post,* August 29, 2023)

See also the potential for casualties on a Hiroshima/Nagasaki level in "Why is the World Ignoring a Looming Genocide in Sudan?" by Robbie Gramer, *Foreign Policy,* May 28, 2024.

The World's Worst Hunger Crisis

A full 15% of the population of Darfur and Kordofan—2.5 million people—are projected to die from disease and starvation by September 2024. The civil war has totally destroyed the once-beautiful high-rise city of Khartoum. Furthermore, it has disrupted the delivery of humanitarian aid, shut down telecommunications making wired funds from overseas no longer accessible, and destroyed farm lands and herds. A recent online report from Clingendael, a Dutch think tank, noted that "Sudan has a long tradition of sharing food . . . these soup kitchen initiatives are often informal but can be very well organized. **But if the very hungriest people are given even an extra 1-2 pieces of bread a day, these extra deaths could drop down to 1 million.** However, if these food sharing kitchens are disrupted because funds or food supplies run out, or if armies shut them down, excess mortality could rise to four million by September ("From Hunger to Death: An Estimate of Excess Mortality in Sudan," Relief Web, May 2024).

A Suspicious Silence from the International Community

In a country that is predominantly Muslim (94%) how are Sudanese Christians (4%) coping with this devastation, destruction, and famine? What do they say to the body of Christ in the rest of the world? In April 2024, Jayson Casper of *Christianity Today* interviewed Rafat Samir, Secretary General of the Sudan Evangelical Alliance (a member of the World Evangelical Alliance) which represents 75% of the evangelicals in Sudan. *CT* asked Samir if Sudanese

evangelical churches had a political opinion about the civil war and what he would like to say to those outside of Sudan:

> Only that we will never support war—we want peace . . . I told [government officials] it is not about the [SAF] army or the RSF; it is about human life. We cannot support killing and destruction . . . As evangelicals, both sides hate us. They burned our churches. . . . We are clear that we stand for life.

> There is suspicious silence coming from the international community . . . Our issues are not on CNN, and no one pays attention to news from Sudan. It makes the church feel like no one cares. No one is standing up to say: Stop the war. We don't hear that people are praying for us. We don't see statements from churches to represent us before their governments. (Jayson Casper, "Forgotten War: Sudan's Displaced Christians Brace for 'World's Worst' Hunger Crisis," *Christianity Today,* April 14, 2024)

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
In Myanmar: Are NGOs the New Colonialists?

Myanmar has a history of decades of civil war, perhaps a legacy of how borders were drawn when colonial powers left. Dozens of NGOs have come and gone, trying to help bring peace and stability—and many mistakes have been made.

> "Myanmar was the only place where applicants needed no local language skills and did not have to have any local experience." Putting it more bluntly, Western peace-making in Myanmar became a neocolonial undertaking carried out by people suffering from a White Messiah Complex: "We have to go and tell those funny little brown fellows how to run their country, and, because we are big and clever white guys, surely they have to listen to us."

> The absurdity of foreigners claiming they could help bring decades of civil wars in Myanmar to an end becomes obvious if one turns it around and puts it in a European context. How would the Spaniards react if Thai peacemakers came and said they were prepared to mediate in the dispute with Catalan separatists? ("Foreign Peacemakers are Back, But the Last Thing Myanmar Needs is More White Messiahs," *The Irrawaddy,* April 1, 2024)

In Gaza: When NGOs are Infiltrated for Political Purposes

The delivery of humanitarian supplies, medical supplies, and food have been directly impacted by Israel's advance into Rafah and the closing of the Egypt/Rafah border. It has also been complicated by the allegations of individuals recruited and inserted by Hamas into NGOs and UN agencies. Witness the controversial trial of a former World Vision employee hired twenty years ago as Director of World Vision Gaza ("Will US taxpayers fund Hamas through 'humanitarian aid'?"). Ostensibly, Hamas inserted him into the Christian NGO for the purpose of siphoning off donated funds—over $50 million World Vision funds were redirected to help build the tunnels.

This shock was dwarfed by the discovery of over 12 UNRWA (the UN relief agency for Palestinian refugees) employees who allegedly were actively involved in the October 7 attack and by the allegations that 1,468 employees—or more than eleven percent—are "active members" of Hamas or Palestinian Islamic

Jihad, the second most prominent militant group in Gaza, according to Israeli intelligence. Suspicion goes both ways. These complications have made NGOs very suspect in the countries they purport to serve and have also undermined their ability to raise donations internationally because of donors' suspicion with respect to the true nature of the use of the funds raised.

In India: NGOs Suspected of Ulterior Motives

The fate of NGOs under Prime Minister Modi and the BJP in India was evaluated in *The Economist*. With over 200,000 registered NGOs in India, 17,000 have had their licenses to receive foreign contributions canceled since 2014. Even one of the most well-known think tanks in Delhi, the Centre for Policy Research, has had to lay off 200 researchers—and it might not make it.

> Most [targeted NGOs] fit into two categories. The first is non-Hindu, faith-based NGOs, which BJP figures accuse of trying to convert Hindus . . . Hardly any NGO works explicitly for that aim. Yet of those that lost foreign-funding licences in the past two years, more than half were Christian or Muslim. The India branch of World Vision, an ecumenical Christian outfit that has been working on child welfare in India for seven decades and was assisting over 300,000 children, lost its licence last month.

> The second major target are groups the BJP considers to be ideological opponents. . . . Aakar Patel, a former head of Amnesty International's India office, claims Mr. Modi considers the entire sector "a disease." Amnesty International, an NGO known for probing abuses by Sangh activists, was another victim. It ceased operations in India in 2020 . . . ("India's Civil Society is Under Attack," *The Economist,* February 24, 2024)

Israel/Hamas War
Ideologies

An in-depth article about the Israel/Hamas war (published in the March 2024 issue of *Christianity Today*) takes a look at some of the ideologies behind Hamas' barbaric attack, Israel's aggressive response, the global rise of anti-Semitism, and the widespread condemnation of Israel's tactics to eradicate Hamas.

> Ideology is a story that offers a key to history. It frames a present crisis such that it points to an inevitable future. It also creates the overwhelming sense that the future is certain, and that its followers are agents of the progress of history. That sense of inevitability has a powerful—and terrible—effect on its subjects; they become capable of immeasurable cruelty.

> Nazi ideology proposed that the German people were destined for global rule but were being subverted by the Jews . . . Nazi officials and functionaries imagined themselves as good people who weren't merely doing their jobs but were doing bold, daring work ushering in a utopian future. . . .

> When you've enshrined violence as an almost sacramental means of pursuing that utopian future, and when you've spent decades telling that story to your children and their children, any talk of peacemaking will remain irrational. That isn't to say peace is impossible, but it is to suggest that until you do the

work of articulating a better story, one in which violence no longer serves as a means of redemption, this cycle will continue . . . Some might interject that there are parallels to Hamas's ideology among Israelis, particularly in the right-wing settler movement. There's some truth to that. The most radical elements of the settler movement envision the reclamation of all the historic land of Israel, which would require at least the subjugation, if not the wholesale displacement, of Arab residents. ("The Evil Ideas Behind October 7," *Christianity Today,* March 2024)

Another type of ideology is also at work—less noticeable, less in-your-face. NGOs, UN relief agencies (UNRWA was the largest employer in Gaza with over 13,000 employees), foreign journalists, foreign doctors and other medical personnel, even student protesters on university campuses, must have had to ignore things that were becoming apparent:

They would have had to keep quiet, deflect, or openly lie about the presence of Hamas at hospitals, caches of weapons at schools, and the group's ubiquitous tunnel network. There were only two options: Cooperate with Hamas, which meant ignoring, enabling, or turning a blind eye to terror activity; or abandon their mission and abandoning those they were committed to serving at the same time.

Here again ideology played a role—though a different ideology than that of Hamas. In this case, it was anticolonial ideology, imported from places like Algeria, South Africa, and India, where European colonialism impoverished indigenous people and created a two-tiered society. Palestinian nationalists embraced the language of this ideology, . . . it took hold in the global Left and the academy, reframing the Israel-Palestine conflict as a clash between European colonizers (Jews) and the indigenous people of the land (Palestinians).

As with many ideological histories, this one does not withstand scrutiny. . . . the parallels with European colonialism are almost nonexistent, since most Jews who settled in British Mandatory Palestine (and the Ottoman Empire before that) came fleeing instability, violence, and mass slaughter, often purchasing their land at a premium. A majority of Jews who came after the establishment of the State of Israel came as refugees, particularly after neighboring Arab states seized their Jewish residents' property and kicked them out. ("The Evil Ideas Behind October 7," *Christianity Today,* March 2024)

Palestinians—and Palestinian Christians

Palestinians have some extremely legitimate complaints: the massive number of casualties in Gaza in the past nine months, predominantly civilians, the loss of land held for generations, violence against them and their families by settlers ("The Unpunished: How Extremists Took Over Israel," *The New York Times,* May 14, 2024), a second-class citizenship in Israel, and refusal of citizenship by surrounding countries, to name a few ("I'm a Palestinian Citizen of Israel," *The Guardian,* Oct. 22, 2023). One of the best spokesmen for Palestinian Christians is former Archbishop Elias Chacour, of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, and author of the books *Blood Brothers* and *We Belong to this Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation.*

Here is an excellent YouTube talk giving his story and his perspective: https://instituteofcatholicculture.org/events/blood-brothers/video/194923179.

A Palestinian Christian professor Grace Al-Zoughbi who teaches at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut wrote a beautiful piece recently looking at wisdom, suffering, and the shunning of evil from Job 28–42.

The wisdom provided by "fearing the Lord and shunning evil" becomes poignant as we experience anguish related to the specific calamity of the past six months in Palestine. By trusting that God is with us in our suffering, that He has not forgotten us, our faith is anchored in the very fact that God is in the scene, and that He is bigger than all the injustices we have to endure. Wisdom is not necessarily the ability to find answers for our questions during the time of suffering (as Job and his friends were seeking to do) but in our commitment and intention to fear the Lord and shun evil even when life hurts, even when we are stripped away from all sources of comfort, freedom, and rights. What brings healing and repair to our current crisis is not the anger of man, or the pride of a sinner, not the wisdom of kings, nor international summits. Through decades of anguish only one thing holds true, the faithfulness and wisdom of God as it transpires in Job 28. (https://abtslebanon.org/2024/04/25/where-can-wisdom-be-found-fearing-god-and-shunning-evil-as-transformation/)

Are Wars Ever "Just"?

These are very difficult times. Wonderful Christians throughout more than 2000 years have had different answers to the questions of suffering, evil, wars, and death. One resource for thinking about whether there are ever "Just Wars" is a thoughtful online essay looking at Richard Hays' writing on nonviolence ("An Analysis of the Ethic of Violence and War in Richard Hays' The Moral Vision of the New Testament," by Andrew S. Ames Fuller).

Intertwining of Religion and Nationalism

An interesting review by Joram Tarusarira of the book *When Politics are Sacralized: Comparative Perspectives on Religious Claims and Nationalism,* edited by Rouhana and Shalhoub-Kervorkian, was posted on a Notre Dame website, Contending Modernities. Tarusarira examines the intertwining of nationalism and Christianity in Zimbabwe.

What follows from the arguments presented in the book and my own reflection on the Zimbabwean context is that the fusion of religion and nationalism is not a necessary outcome. Rather, fusing the two is an instrument used by political elites to justify and legitimate particular political policies, actions, and imaginaries . . . In Zimbabwe, political elites often invoke African religion and Christianity to similar ends. The link between African religion, Christianity, and nationalism dates to the liberation struggle of the 1970s. . . . What makes religion so powerful and compelling in this context is that it dogmatically sacralizes, and thus provides an absolute and non-negotiable quality to, policies and actions. Sacralization thus closes off debate over policies. ("When Politics are Sacralized: Religion and Nationalism in Zimbabwe," by Tarusarira) **IJFM**

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