Revisiting the Homogeneous Unit Principle

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

by Alan McMahan

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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

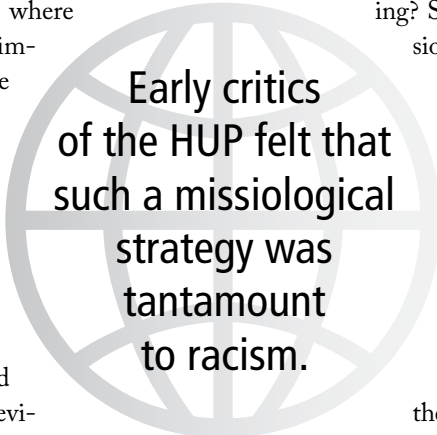Early critics of the HUP felt that such a missiological strategy was tantamount to racism.

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?

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
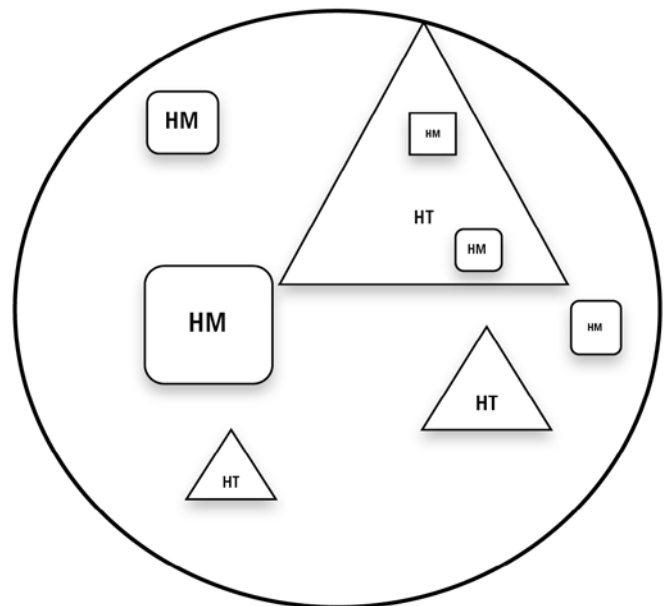
Using Wagner's typology of ministry group sizes (Celebration, Congregation, and Cell),[13] Carl George then represented the larger worship gatherings (75 people +) at the top of the chart and the smaller nurture groups and ministry teams (15 people or less) at the bottom of the chart[14] (See figure 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
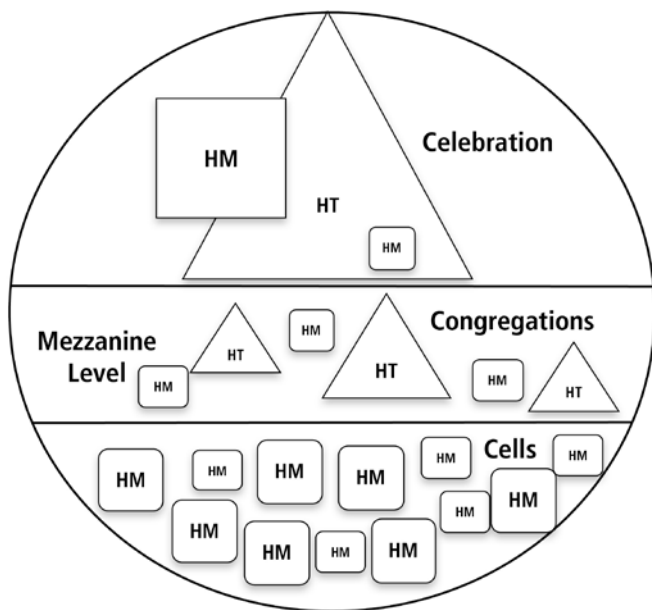
The point of these charts is to highlight their value for assessing the kinds of HT and HM ministries that might be used in a church or a mission effort into the community. It may help church or mission leaders to better visualize the mix of HT and HM ministries they deploy and how they can be used creatively 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
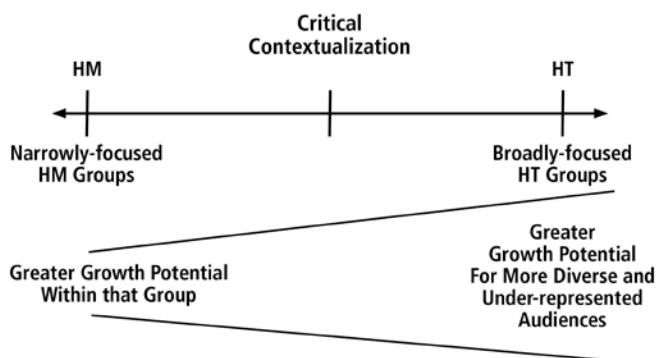
The more narrowly focused HM groups would allow for a more highly contextualized message to be delivered, which may in turn lower the cultural barriers that need to be crossed by new believers. However, in doing that they run the risk of obscuring the message for those who don't resonate with the frequency 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).

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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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[13] C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 111–126.

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

[15] Donald A. McGavran, *Ethnic Realities and the Church* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 165ff.

[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).