

**Living Out Unity in Ethnic Diversity:**  
***Every Nation, Tribe and Tongue***

I attended 4 yrs. in Bible College after high school with the intent to work with the English-speaking 2<sup>nd</sup> generation in the Chinese church.

I pursued my M. Div. at Regent College in Vancouver where I was challenged by the world renown theologian, J.I. Packer, to critically assess the biblical foundation of the prevalent Homogenous Unit Principle for church growth [i.e., most effective church growth is carried out in the context of a group defined by similarity in cultural background]. This was a theologically defining moment for me because I began to re-think about if I should see my ministry context beyond a Chinese church context.

After 4.5 yrs. in pastoral ministry the Lord guided me to Aberdeen, Scotland, to further my research. Participated in preaching and small group ministry in the fastest growing charismatic, Baptist church in town, Libby and I witnessed what the Apostle John is saying in Rev. 7:9-10:

“<sup>9</sup> After this I saw a vast crowd ... from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb ... <sup>10</sup> And they were shouting with a great roar, ‘Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!’”

This experience of a dynamic, Spirit-enabled worship in a faith community was another theological defining moment for me – it affirmed and reinforced God’s purpose in using the unity-in-diversity of His intercultural people from every nation, tribe and language to be its signpost of His kingdom reality.

Here is the personal back story of the vision of Cornerstone. In 1995 God called together an original pre-Cornerstone group of 35 second gen young adults (Chinese heritage and 2 non-Asian descent) to begin planting a multicultural, community-orientated church in 1996 and became independent in 98.

After 25 yrs. we now have 1,200-1,300 adult & children congregants (in-person and online) of over 40 different countries of origins – let’s praise and thank God together!

Last year all the staff and board members together participated in a seminar and a full day workshop to learn about intercultural dynamics and communication. We were personally and corporately enriched and challenged to grow in serving and making space for the diverse people God has brought to Cornerstone.

But we still have much to grow as we consider:

**How can we bring peace to people who came from war-torn countries terrorized by hatred and fear?**

**How can we create harmony in a fragmented country shattered by ethnic tension and economic disparity?**

**How can we celebrate unity in a community separated by racial stereotypes and cultural enclaves?**

**As a church composed of diverse people, how can we relate to each other more authentically and deeply across our ethnic and cultural differences while keeping the unity that we share in Christ?**

Today we begin this new series, “Living Out Unity in Ethnic Diversity” with the aim to encourage the whole church to join us in this journey. And this morning’s theme is “Every Nation, Tribe and Tongue.”

The tagline to every nation, tribe and tongue refers back to the dynamic worship of believers “from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb” in Rev. 7:9-10.

The Apostle John is definitely recording messages and visions about the future revealed to him. But prophecy in the bible is both foretelling and forth telling, i.e., about what will happen in the future and what God’s message to His people is in the present time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Curtis P. DeYoung, *Beyond Rhetoric*, p. 37. And it has been pointed out that the Greek divided the world on the basis of culture, thus Greeks and barbarians; the Romans on the basis of politics, hence citizens and slaves; the Jews on religious

Here John’s encouraging words are directed to the seven churches (chs. 2-3), assuring the believers God’s sovereign purpose is already enacted in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Lamb of God – so while God’s people “from every nation and tribe and language” are going through challenging times, they are called to continue to worship the One who holds the future and trust that all will work out according to His will, as John envisioned.

We must keep in mind that “Jesus grew up in a multicultural, multiethnic, and international neighbourhood”<sup>1</sup> and the world which Jesus incarnated was divided by racial, political, socio-economic lines.

But Jesus, offered God’s kingdom to all alike and the church lived out her multicultural reality since the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2).

In a fragmented but intercultural Graeco-Roman world, every book in the NT engages the unity-in-diversity dynamics of local faith communities.

Paul writes about the reconciling power of the good news:

All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing.

ground, thus Jews and Gentiles. (J. Herbert Kane, *Wanted: World Christians*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1986, pp. 141-144, here p. 143.)

***From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.*** (Col. 3:11 *The Message*)<sup>2</sup>

Paul is not teaching some strategy for church growth but the rescuing purpose and will of God to create a new blended humanity with His power: **when God reconciles the world and brings diverse peoples together in Christ, it is love confronting any ghetto tendencies and the ethnic walls of “apartheid” are torn down.**<sup>3</sup>

Justo L. Gonzalez states that the most difficult task is not bringing ethnic minorities into the Christian community but *“telling their own people about the many peoples and nations and languages who are also called to be part of the great multitude that worships the Lamb.”*<sup>4</sup>

And Gary Parrett laments: “It often seems that it is easier for people in our church communities to cross an ocean for a brief ‘missionary’ visit than to cross the street to build lasting relationships with neighbours who are near us but unlike us. It is also apparent that *many learn how to*

---

<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere Paul writes: “In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 3:28 *The Message*) “The Messiah has made things up between us so that we’re now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance ... <sup>16</sup> The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. <sup>17</sup> Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. <sup>18</sup> He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.” (Eph. 2:14-18 *The Message*)

*navigate their entire lives without ever truly passing through the world of such neighbours.”*<sup>5</sup>

Jesus, Paul, and John are speaking against ethnocentric mindset, discriminatory conduct, and superiority complex: There is no superior race, no thorough breeds, and no second class citizens in God’s eyes.

The practical application is crystal clear:

**Keep in check ethnic pride & personal prejudice;<sup>6</sup>  
Develop cross cultural competency and relational intelligence.**

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Samuel George Hines, “First Things First: Thinking Reconciliation Precedes Doing Reconciliation,” in *Beyond Rhetoric: reconciliation as a Way of Life*, p. 6. Love Lazarus Sechrest writes, “the ethnoracially reconciled church active in the God-given work of creating and protecting unity is the church that manifests and proclaims God’s wisdom in reconciling the cosmos to God’s self ... Christ is the glue that holds this new entity together and in whom God creates a third group ... that can be a starting point for a more positive intergroup relations”. (*Race and Rhyme*, pp. 336, 338.)

<sup>4</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *For the Healing of the Nations*, p. 91. (Emphasis ours.)

<sup>5</sup> Gary Parrett, *A Many Colour Kingdom*, p. 70; emphasis ours.

<sup>6</sup> “All people struggle with sins of superiority, inferiority and greed rooted in history.” (David Anderson, *Gracism*, p. 18.)



Cf. K's Gr. 2's Chinese boy's comments.

Kay's story brings to mind our blind spot that "Christ may have destroyed the wall of hostility between us, but we have grown so accustomed to the wall that we live as though it were still standing ... We tend to find those who look, think, act, speak, and smell as we do and congregate with them while excluding others."<sup>7</sup>

According to UN and BBC,

**Toronto is the most diverse city in the world.<sup>8</sup>**

And Census Data 2021 from Statistics Canada reports that,

**Toronto has the highest percentage of population born outside of the country – 54.6%.<sup>9</sup>**

**Markham has the highest percentage of visible minorities – 82%.<sup>10</sup>**

In order to advance an effective intercultural ministry in this metropolitan, pluralistic, multicultural environment, **we must be a Jesus-centered, Spirit-enabled, prayer-sustained, and relational intelligent intercultural church because the multicultural world is in our "Jerusalem."**

We recognize the fact that Christian self-identity is determined by our relationship with Jesus – Paul says, "it is no longer I live, but Christ lives in me."<sup>11</sup>

**But God is not colour blind, mono-colour & one dimensional but multi-colour & multi-dimensional. God's people are "priests" ("bridging-heaven-and earth--people") called to model kingdom mosaic.**

The integrity of Cornerstone's intercultural vision depends on our relational integrity. Cornerstone's vision must first be seen "in house" in this most diverse community in Canada

<sup>7</sup> Gary A. Parrett, "The Wondrous Cross and the Broken Wall," in *A Many Colored Kingdom*, pp. 75, 77.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.studyabroadfoundation.org/blogs/why-toronto-most-multicultural-city-world>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Toronto&DGUIDlist=2021A00053520005&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Markham&DGUIDlist=2021A00053519036&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

<sup>11</sup> Gal. 2.20; cf. 2 Cor. 5.14ff. Klyne Snodgrass, Professor of Biblical Literature/Author, writes: "Cultural preferences must take a backseat ... Culture is important ... but Christ, not culture, gives the primary definition to life. Culture is the means by which Christ is expressed, but the message is Christ himself."

before the world would take our message of peace/reconciliation seriously.

When looking at other references to “nations, tribes, and languages” in the book of Revelation,<sup>12</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez has pointed out that while the church is a multicultural reality, so too the Lamb and its witnesses are to be opposed by people out of every nation, tribe, and language:

**“Multiculturalism ... is also an important trait of the powers of evil ... The glorious multitude dressed in white robes and singing hymns to the Lamb ... But so does the multitude that bows before the beast and adores it.”<sup>13</sup>**

The traits of the power of evil against Christ are in our face every day; we witness their hideous manifestations in racism, alienation, personal and national conflict, ethnic cleansing, systemic exploitation, and brutal oppression 24/7, just like what the ancient people suffered.

But the colour consciousness we find in the bible always advances shalom-peace, justice, and righteousness – it is never an ideological or political basis for enslaving, oppressing, or demeaning people different from us in any way.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Rev. 11, 13, 17. Further see pp. 78-85.

<sup>13</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *Healing*, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Cain Hope Felder, *Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives*, pp. 1-2. Yascha Mounk has observed in his book, *The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time*, that some who vigorously rail against injustice and racism and advocate identity politics create more tribal conflict instead of collaborative compatriots. (Cf.

Listen to what Paul says, “<sup>19</sup>I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people ... <sup>22</sup>I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ--but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view ... <sup>23</sup>I did all this because of the Message. (1 Cor. 9:19, 22-23 *The Message*)

The practical application is crystal clear:

### **Live Out Jesus-presence For Each Other Before The Watching World.**

God-becoming-man in Jesus (the incarnation) is the perfect model of intercultural embodiment and embrace. Jesus seamlessly crosses cultural divides and extends the Father’s love equally to Jews, Romans, Samaritans, Canaanites, and others.

The four gospels record 132 contacts that Jesus had with people – 6 were in the Temple, 4 in the synagogues, and 122 were out with people in the mainstream of life. **Jesus did not remain secluded in the desert, he moved around in different neighbourhoods in Palestine!**<sup>15</sup>

When we follow the Jesus-way and adapt in everyday intercultural encounters, our cultural blindness will be

[https://www.economist.com/culture/2023/10/19/how-to-cancel-cancel-culture?utm\\_content=ed-picks-article-link-1&etear=nl\\_special\\_1&utm\\_campaign=a.coronavirus-special-edition&utm\\_medium=email.internal-newsletter.np&utm\\_source=salesforce-marketing-cloud&utm\\_term=11/4/2023&utm\\_id=1805996](https://www.economist.com/culture/2023/10/19/how-to-cancel-cancel-culture?utm_content=ed-picks-article-link-1&etear=nl_special_1&utm_campaign=a.coronavirus-special-edition&utm_medium=email.internal-newsletter.np&utm_source=salesforce-marketing-cloud&utm_term=11/4/2023&utm_id=1805996)

<sup>15</sup> Author J. Kirk Johnston, *Why Christians Sin?*, p. 142

exposed and we then learn in “a trial by fire, a test of inner strength, of personal faith, and most of all a test of the veracity of one’s love”<sup>16</sup> to better serve people.

Michelle Ami Reyes says, “**At the heart of the Christian life is a commitment to a messy web of cross-cultural relationships that seeks the flourishing of all people ...**”<sup>17</sup>

Hardcopies of Practical **Tips to Cultivate “Intercultural Intelligence”** are available at the Welcome Desk and you can also access it on our website, <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/joy>



When people find personal acceptance, experience safety and security, capture by the techno colour display in unity-in-diversity generated by the power of God’s word and Spirit, **Cornerstone becomes the best expression of the Canadian mosaic and shows the world that we feel at home in God’s intercultural future now!**

<sup>16</sup> Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Michelle Ami Reyes, *Becoming All Things: How Small Changes Lead To Lasting Connections Across Cultures*, p. xxiii. See also George Yancey, *One Body One Spirit*:

As we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, let’s keep in mind John’s vision in Rev. 5:

“<sup>6</sup> Then I saw **a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing ...**<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song with these words: “You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. **For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.**<sup>10</sup> **And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth.**”

Every time we partake in the Lord’s Supper, we remember Jesus and are reminded that God’s will is done through the crucified and risen Lamb who has made believers “from every tribe and language and people and nation to become a kingdom of priest.”

What God-in-Jesus has accomplished in the past, He will bring to its completion in the future, but its impact is felt when we live out the vision of unity in ethnic diversity!

“No church can create a culture in which one is totally comfortable ... All human cultures have strengths and weaknesses ... since the cultures of members of all races are made up of human beings corrupted by sin, it is foolish to believe that there is any human-created social culture that cannot be improved.” (pp. 33, 40.)