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OJIM

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The *Oxford Journal for Intercultural Mission* is a popular and easy-to-read journal published quarterly by St Paul's, Slough – the designated intercultural mission-resourcing hub in the Diocese of Oxford. Occasionally, a special issue will be published to mark or celebrate an event such as Race Equality Week, Black History Month or South Asian Heritage Month.

The journal will offer a range of reflections on issues impacting the growth of intercultural mission and ministry in the Church of England. These will include UKME (United Kingdom Minority Ethnic) and GMH (Global Majority Heritage) participation, governance structures, ministry discernment and training, racial justice, cultural awareness, preaching and evangelism.

We aim to provide a forum for bloggers, church planters, students, leaders, teachers, and preachers to share experiences, expertise, research, and intercultural mission tools to inspire a movement and growth of intercultural worshipping communities within the Church of England. Find us online at **oxford.anglican.org/ojim**

Editors and Contributors

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Articles
OJIM publishes articles that are 1500–1800 words (including endnotes and bibliography). Usually, the General Editor will invite a contributor to submit an article, giving them the theme for the issue and the deadline for submission. However, prospecting contributors to OJIM should submit articles by email to the General Editor to: journal@stpaulsslough.org.uk

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To ensure consistency of style in other areas, please contact the General Editor for style guidelines.

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The General Editor selects the books to be reviewed and individuals to do the review. Even so, prospective reviewers may contact the General Editor suggesting a specific book to be reviewed or submitting a book review for consideration.

Disclaimer
The opinions in any article published in this journal are the author's alone and do not necessarily represent the Editors, St Paul's, Slough, or the Diocese of Oxford.

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INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

At long last, we have a journal to champion intercultural mission in the Church of England and to help build confidence and competence in its ministers in this vital area. The journal aims to provide a platform for those with proven experience in intercultural mission and ministry to share best practices and resources and, by so doing, to inspire a movement of lay and ordained ministers within the Church of England that will birth many more intercultural worshipping communities. We believe that the future of the Church of England depends on its ability to become a genuinely intercultural church because the United Kingdom is a community of many tribes, languages, peoples, and nations.

The ministry terrain in the United Kingdom is fast changing and remarkably complex, with diverse cultural and ethnic identities marked by different histories and evolving in different directions. Considering this dynamic ministry landscape, a discussion of how mission should be carried out and churches in the Church of England ordered needs to be encouraged – not least to increase participation of UKME/GMH persons in all aspects and levels of ministry.

Writing about intercultural theology is not breaking new ground as such. Intercultural theology began in the 1970s to express theological mutuality and equality between cultures. Since then, the word 'intercultural' has gained popularity in several fields, secular and religious, so that it is now more 'on trend' and helpful to speak of mission as 'intercultural' rather than 'cross-cultural' as a way of expressing cultural engagement in the contemporary world. Significantly, intercultural mission is therefore relational, mutual, dialogical, open-ended and creates space within which God's *missio dei* can be experienced.[1]

This inaugural journal has outstanding articles from experienced and qualified intercultural mission practitioners, namely: The Revd John Root (a pioneer in 'intercultural' ministry in the Church of England and a formidable blogger); Jessie Tang (a pioneer in intercultural worship and diocesan director of intercultural ministry); Canon Dr Francis Omondi (a church planter, mission expert in an intercultural and multifaith context); Peter Oyugi (an advocate for UKME/GMH voices in global intercultural mission); The Revd Dr Jem Hovil (a Bible trainer, theologian and leader in intercultural mission); and the Revd Naomi Hill (an essential member of the intercultural mission-resourcing hub in the Diocese of Oxford).

I commend this edition to you and hope that our contributors will inspire you to be part of this new movement and the growth of intercultural worshipping communities in the Church of England.

Bishop Tim

THIS QUARTER

John Root, in his article entitled, 'A New Testament Perspective on the Challenges and Opportunities for Intercultural Mission', reflects on how intercultural mission in the New Testament, whilst different from ours, nonetheless can raise challenges and underline opportunities for facing the church today in a society of considerable and growing cultural diversity.

Jessie Tang, writing on 'Corporate Worship Expressed Interculturally' considers how some people are beginning to explore possibilities for global worship as an appetite for more diverse expressions of church and ministry continues to grow in recent years. In her article, she defines the term intercultural worship, sets out principles for worship and suggests tips on beginning the journey of worshipping interculturally.

Francis Omondi's article offers a biblical justification for intercultural churches. It employs Luke's portrayal of the pattern of ministry at Antioch, which Omondi considers to be the most profound model to support churches in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. Finally, he concludes that intercultural churches present the most authentic kingdom witness in culturally diverse societies.

Peter Oyugi, writing on 'Learning to Serve Well in Intercultural Mission Partnerships', discusses challenges around partnership in intercultural mission, including finances, motives, perceptions, control, and trust. Peter's paper highlights that money is not the only resource we are expected to share. Instead, by cultivating certain qualities and empowering everyone, we can develop strong collaborative partnerships that enhance God's mission as we serve alongside each other.

Jem Hovil, while writing on a biblical justification of the intercultural church, says there is a tendency to approach the topic of intercultural church and the Bible as just that, a theme to consider. Instead, his article points us to the intercultural nature of God's scriptures before using this lens to reveal some of the riches they contain. It asks what an intercultural-church text of choice might be before alighting on an exemplary verse from Ephesians (3.10) and declaring the 'manifold wisdom of God'.

Finally, **Naomi Hill** provides valuable insights into biblical perspectives of intercultural leadership. She highlights three insights that the Bible gives on the challenges and cost of intercultural leadership, namely the inevitability of change and the challenge of leading others through it, the need to hold lightly to our structures and expand our leadership teams to do so, and the personal challenge to leaders to transform their own lives as they navigate their own mistakes and misunderstandings.

A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERCULTURAL MISSION

The Revd John Root *was for 31 years Vicar in Alperton, near Wembley, where the church started two Asian-language congregations. Before that, he was Vice-Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge, and ministered in Harlesden and a church plant on a housing estate in Hackney. He is now involved in retirement ministry in Tottenham. John does a weekly blog, 'Out of Many, One People,' on issues of faith and race (accessed at johnroot@substack.com). His wife Sheila is from Malaysia, of Malayalee background. Their son is a co-founder of an IT start-up company.*

One-quarter of the population of England and Wales are from 'minority ethnic' backgrounds, according to the 2021 Census figures. Numerical growth has also promoted wider geographical spread. When I wrote a booklet on *Building Multi-Racial Churches* in 1994, it could be (and was) seen as being of niche interest to a slim minority of parishes; by now, with the Latimer Trust re-publishing it, mildly revised, in 2020 the topic is essential to virtually every parish in the Church of England.

By 'Intercultural Mission' in the title of this paper, I have in mind that the church, both globally and as regards the Church of England, is 'intercultural': that is, it includes people whose cultures – assumptions about how we think and what we do – are significantly different from each other, and yet who are called to take forward God's mission in our societies together, united in love and the Holy Spirit. By comparison, using the phrase 'inter-racial' is rightly often frowned upon as giving unwarranted significance to the noticeable differences in physical appearance between groups of people. But, on the other hand, the phrase 'inter-ethnic' puts us on stronger and more biblical grounds, pointing to the 'people groups' of the world, usually with shared ancestry and place of origin, whose specific identity manifests in different behavioural and thought patterns. 'Intercultural', as I understand it, focuses on these patterns as they are manifested in here-and-now behaviour and relationships happening in our society and churches.

Thus, intercultural mission can be described as *a mission to all the diverse cultures in an area by churches with culturally diverse members and leaders.* (This could also serve as quite a good definition of the parish system.)

'Intercultural mission' contrasts the approach of the 'Homogenous Unit Principle' (from Donald McGavran's 1980 book *Understanding Church Growth*), which argues that church growth happens fastest when particular evangelists and congregations focus exclusively on specific ethnic groups. However, McGavran's emphasis on the evangelistic utility of such an approach does at least warn against the facile opposing error of thinking that 'intercultural' involves a fairly easy melding of skin tones, food, dress and the like without having a realistic awareness of the importance of much deeper differences concerning values, authority, family, truth which can easily trip up the unwary. (There are various ways of conceptualising this: I find the 'iceberg' illustration in Patty Lane's *A Beginner's Guide to Crossing Cultures*, 2002, illuminating).

A foundational theological basis for intercultural church life and mission identified when addressing the combination of Jews and Gentiles who made up the Ephesian church, Paul writes of Christ 'that he might

create in himself one new humanity in the place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross' (Eph 2:15,16). It is hard for us, who give decreasing attention to the significance of the material and physical, to appreciate the importance that Jews gave to such material matters as food-eating as a clear, unbreakable distinction between themselves and pagan Gentiles. Peter's withdrawal from eating with Gentiles, described in Galatians 2, was treated by Paul not just as bad manners or even racism, but so important a denial of the gospel's purpose that the courtesies due to colleagues had to be over-ridden by the need to maintain eating together: one table, one gospel; two tables, no gospel.

Our context – marked by major, deep-seated cultural differences between a wide variety of ethnic groups – is different from that of the New Testament. However, I believe the following challenges and opportunities are still significant.

Challenges

a) The challenge to leaders – intercultural awareness.

'I have become all things to all people so that I might by any means save some' (1 Cor 9:22) was Paul's summary of his mission strategy. For Paul, this meant the pagans of Lystra (Acts 14:8–20), the philosophers of Athens (Acts 17: 16–34) and the hedonists of Corinth (Acts 18:1–17). (Interestingly, while Lystra was geographically close to Paul's hometown of Tarsus and Athens far away, one senses that he felt more congruence with the intellectuals of Athens than the rural people of Lystra.)

It could be said that Paul was advocating what has come to be formulated as 'Cultural Intelligence' (CI or CQ) by writers such as David Livermore. One emphasis of Cultural Intelligence that I find illuminating is 'switching off cruise control'; in other words, we can be like relaxed motorists in situations of cultural congruence. We don't need to think too deeply about what we are saying or doing. We know instinctively. But in relating to other cultures, we need to 'wake up' to start thinking carefully and creatively about our ministry. Thus, Paul's sermons at Lystra and Athens (or at the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia – Acts 13:16–41) were all radically different.

For our ministries, this might raise questions such as:

- How far are these sermon illustrations relevant to people of that background? And what would be more relevant?
- Does baptism or marriage have different significance in this culture, and do I need to adapt my procedures?
- What difference does an honour/shame culture make to how leadership is exercised?

Leaders who may have operated very effectively in culturally congruent situations may well find transitioning to culturally diverse congregations difficult unless they can develop the capacity for the more abstract thinking that sees behind outward patterns of behaviour to recognise the deeper currents and forces that generate such behaviour. This can be a challenge for people whose ministerial practice has been formed in a specific context, such as with diasporic congregations or in student ministry.

b) The challenge to congregations: intercultural sensitivity.

Paul wrote to the Romans: 'Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour. For Christ did not please himself' (Romans 15:2,3). The context here was over what was acceptable regarding food consumption and holy days, especially Sabbaths, to Jewish and Gentile Christians. (Tom Wright suggests that Paul's use of 'weak' and 'strong' was perhaps a tactful way of veiling the ethnic differences – *Romans: The New Testament for Everyone*.)

These are not controversial or painful issues in most multi-cultural churches today, but Paul's basic principle – a restraint that accedes to the concerns of others – most certainly is. In a study of several multi-ethnic churches in Britain, David Baldwin, lecturer in mission at Oak Hill Theological College, found that the most significant cause of controversy and disagreement was different expectations of worship, especially with music. There is something of a consensus on this topic from those who write on multi-cultural churches, ranging from theological conservatives like Bruce Milne to theological liberals like Michael Jagessar[2]. Thus, the black American church planter, David Anderson: 'I have concluded that although I wish I could be all things to all people, that is not realistic. On most Sundays, the majority of people get most of their spiritual needs met, but never all' (*Multicultural Ministry: Finding your Church's Unique Rhythm*, p 177).

In fact, when churches are too effective in meeting members' individual expectations, they can result in people falling away if they move house – the next church 'is not the same'; or even if 'their' church changes in ways not to their liking. Experiencing a strain of discomfort or disconnect in any church, we are part of is essential for personal and spiritual maturity. The long-term growth of the whole church is promoted as flexibility is inculcated into people's church experience.

Opportunities

a) The opportunity for faithful diversity

In Acts 20:4, Luke gives the names of the people who went with Paul to carry to Jerusalem gifts from the churches he had planted: Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus, coming respectively from Beroea, Thessalonica, Derbe and Asia. The importance of the gift is underlined by how earnestly Paul refers to it in his correspondence. Why was it important to him? And why did he gather such a large group to carry it with him? The reasoning is easily missed on a casual reading until we see that the names signified different ethnic backgrounds. Had they been called Praful, Ibrahim, David, Jurgen and Bolaji, we would have quickly got the point. But, in fact, they fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of the nations coming to Jerusalem to worship the Lord (Is 60:3).

The early church's practice from the start shows that this was a central focus. In Acts 2, Luke lists the variety of places that Peter's listeners came from. When the cultural differences between the local Hebrew widows and the more cosmopolitan Hellenic widows caused tensions, the apostles took practical steps to ensure just treatment and prevent fragmentation (Acts 6:1–7). When Luke chooses 'conversion stories' to illustrate Paul's ministry at Philippi, he introduces us to a God-fearing Greek businesswoman, Lydia, a possessed slave-girl, and the gaoler, probably a Roman veteran (Acts 16:11–40). Paul rebukes the wealthy, well-fed church members at Corinth for their 'divisions' and lack of respect for the poor at their eucharistic feasts (1 Cor 11:17ff).

In all these instances, we see the early church navigating the complexities of social and ethnic differences with a principled, theologically driven commitment to visible intercultural unity and witness.

b) The opportunity for relevant witness.

Jesus told his disciples after washing their feet: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). In his *Theological Commentary* on this passage, David Ford writes: 'This opens up the horizon of our loving towards the whole world… *entering as deeply as possible into contemporary situations and challenges, searching for ways of loving that echo the loving of Jesus; and doing all this within a horizon of thinking, imagining and praying that relates to God, all people, and all creation. . . The mission of the church is inseparable from the sort of community the church is*' (p 266, italics Ford's).

This 'global horizon' (Ford) is a particularly important way in which the church today ought to be speaking spontaneously,

relevantly, and challengingly to our world. In political discourse, casting for films, employment, and leadership appointments across every sector, even tv adverts, there is a strong (even neurotic?) anxiety to have ethnically varied representation. The New Testament makes it plain that ethnic diversity should be inherent to the church's nature; our deep shame is that racism and cultural arrogance have often so powerfully inhibited this. Yet it is central to the gospel's convincing power:

'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21).

When a borough councillor said that he thought our church was the only organisation that united the area's three broad 'racial' groups (South Asian, black, white), he saw the gospel's potential in practice. Intercultural mission speaks directly to an aching concern in our society.

c) The opportunity for maturing spiritually.
Christians of all cultures need the challenge to our assumptions and procedures that comes from honest intercultural relationships. Iron sharpens iron. Without contact, indeed conflict, unbiblical aspects of our own culture become established in the church. For example, Paul's conflict with the Corinthian church, described in 2 Corinthians 10–12, arose from the re-emergence within the church of such major cultural values ('human standards', 10:2) as eloquence and bravado (apparently to the neglect of adherence to strict morality); in fact, the sort of 'big man' syndrome so opposite to the servanthood of Jesus and Paul.

Today, it is not difficult to track how culturally homogenous churches not only reflect but often augment the failings of their background culture. Cultural diversity is indeed a 'means of grace' by which we are gifted an outsider's view of unnoticed aspects of our own culture that need amending.

For the New Testament church, intercultural mission was a theological given that gave authenticity to its claim of a unique Saviour and shaped their obedience to a universal Lord.

CORPORATE WORSHIP EXPRESSED INTERCULTURALLY

Jessie Tang *is the Intercultural Ministry Director for the Diocese of Leicester in the Church of England. She is an ethnomusicologist interested in intercultural worship, second-generation immigrants, and missions. She was born and brought up in the UK and loves to speak about how important diversity is in loving others and knowing God more. Jessie is part of Songs2Serve, a ministry equipping intercultural churches across Europe to create new shared worship cultures reflecting God's people's diversity. Jessie also hosts a podcast called ACross Culture – exploring culture, identity, and the Christian faith – because culture does inform everything in life, including our faith!*

Britain is becoming increasingly diverse, and it is no secret that the exploration of culture, ethnicity and diversity is growing in our churches and society. As a result, there is an appetite for new expressions of church and ministry, reflecting the multiplicity of God's people. In such places, many of us are beginning to explore the possibilities around global worship.

The 1996 Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture outlines four aspects of worship, summarised below:

Worship is transcultural
Worship transcends and is beyond all cultures. Between cultures, there are shared liturgical elements – such as the ecumenical creeds and Bible readings – and core liturgical structures, as well as people assembling.

Worship is contextual
Worship reflects a culture's practices and patterns, which are consonant with the values of the Gospel. God is encountered in the local cultures of our world.

Worship is counter-cultural
Worship is critical of its culture and distances itself from the idolatry of any given culture. Therefore, it is crucial in contextualisation to critique sinful and contradictory cultural aspects of the Gospel.

Worship is cross-cultural
Worship crosses boundaries and divides, as Jesus came to be the Saviour of all. (Calvin.edu, 2014) (Songs2Serve, n.d.)

According to this Statement, worship is something that is both beyond culture and reflective of culture. These characteristics highlight the importance of expressing worship with the multiplicity of God's people, who are called to worship (Psalm 86:9), in order to accurately reflect the diversity and global nature of the Christian faith. Using our cultural practices to worship God communicates who is welcome and who is not. A language or musical style can include and exclude. This article focuses on corporate worship expressed interculturally.

In 2018, Anthony Gittins produced a series of diagrams to illustrate the differences between communities that are monocultural, bicultural, cross-cultural, multicultural, and intercultural (Aldous, Dunmore and Seevaratnam, 2020). A monocultural community comprises one culture, whereas a multicultural community has multiple cultures co-existing in one place. An intercultural space, however, necessitates interaction, deeper relationships, and mutual sharing of one another's cultures. Intercultural worship and church are inextricably linked insofar as diverse worship should be part of the journey and embodiment of a church's pursuit of interculturalism. As God's people learn from one another, they also partake in one another's cultural expressions, including singing each other's songs, to create an organically evolving community, where when one member enters, the whole culture changes (Tang, 2021).[3] True intercultural communities are a 'prophetic [and] countercultural witness' (Aldous, Dunmore and Seevaratnam, 2020).

John's eschatological vision in the book

of Revelation speaks of every tribe, nation, people and tongue worshipping the Lamb together (Revelation 7:9–10). As we look forward to this heavenly reality, we also pray for a foretaste of heaven on earth. In this scripture, a great multitude of diverse cultures worships God as one without any culture dominating. To achieve such a beautiful image of equal worship, the Church, which is reconciled with God, must be comprised of people who are reconciled with one another.

Principles of intercultural worship

Van Opstal, in her book *The Next Worship*, notes that reconciliation in worship is expressed in three ways: hospitality, solidarity and mutuality. (Van Opstal, 2016)

Hospitality – "we welcome you."

Worship transforms us and is fundamentally disruptive – taking the focus from the kingdom of self to the kingdom of God and fuelling us to love God and love our neighbours. As our neighbours change, our worship changes – a beautiful sign of welcome.[4] Romans 12:9–13 shows that love is the root of our welcome, actions, worship, and hospitality. Showing hospitality through sung worship in our neighbours' different languages and styles communicates acceptance and welcome.

Solidarity – "we stand with you."

'Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn' (Romans 12:15). Unfortunately, many churches lack the call to carry each other's burdens and mourn with those who are mourning. Inhabiting the same space does not necessarily mean that members are reconciled with one another. Solidarity can be expressed through intercultural worship as congregants sing each other's songs and pray for those who are mourning – especially countries who are going through war or persecution. An example is singing a Persian worship song[5] and displaying the script, with English translation, on screen. Such honouring of the language also helps to communicate a sense of belonging to those who may feel alienated, misunderstood or unseen.

Mutuality – "we need you."

As God's people who are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), we need one another for a greater revelation of the Lord. Seeing and experiencing different expressions of God's people allows us to see different perspectives of God. For example, African-style worship is often exuberant, with themes of freedom, power, and community. Engaging in such a worship style may help Christians to explore using one's body in worship. In addition, joining in with a more devotional and intimate style of South Asian worship can expose someone to learning about intimacy with God.

However, enriching our understanding of God is only achieved when we lay down our preferences and leadership, allowing ourselves to be led by one another. Sacrifice must take place. Sacrificing one's worship preferences and preferred language allows another member to come alive in worship, connect with God and express themselves fully before the Lord. Such an experience should inspire the one who sacrifices to worship. Eventually, the whole church can connect to God in one another's languages and songs – building unity in diversity and worshipping.

How to worship interculturally

For those who are ready to begin an intercultural worship exploration journey, it is important that the leadership of the church be on board. In this way, not only is the worship leader pushing the agenda, but all aspects of church ministry explore what interculturalism is. It is also vital to recognise, even audit, the kinds of people in the congregation, noting someone's ethnicity, culture, language and preferences – so that the songs introduced are representative of the cultures in the room. Finally, it is important to stress that

building a culture of 'bring and share' is ideal, where someone feels safe and able to bring something of their culture for the blessing of others. Some churches may be accustomed to this in relation to sharing meals, but other types of sharing can be explored. For example, consider a gathering where members are invited to bring a cultural practice, such as a favourite worship song or artwork, where everybody can engage and learn together. Eventually, these can find their way into the Sunday service. There are also different models of worship explained in Davis and Lerner's book *Worship Together*, 2015.

Warnings and barriers

Practising intercultural worship in our churches may risk deflecting attention from God when it becomes overly self-conscious (Root, 2018). Although diverse worship is not intended to showcase a church's cultural diversity, it is a very visible form of representation. It is important for those who otherwise are overlooked, such as those of Global Majority Heritage.[6] (Campbell-Stephens, 2020). These are some of the tensions that are held in intercultural communities. There may also be a tendency to focus on the worship event at the expense of developing a genuinely intercultural community where there is a depth of relationship. Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner dedicate a whole chapter to exploring the importance of building worshipping communities rather than worship experiences, stating that 'worshipping communities have worship experiences… but worship experiences do not necessarily lead to worshipping communities' (Davis and Lerner, 2015).

Ian Collinge puts forward two types of objections facing Christians regarding intercultural worship: "I don't know how to" and "I don't want to" (Collinge, 2022). A way to mitigate such objections for those in the first category is through choosing accessible songs, which may initially include only a couple of words in another language. In addition, asking for advice from practitioners and using online resources can be a relief.[7]

The latter category, "I don't want to", requires more profound work, as it is not merely focused on practicalities. Concerning this, solid biblical teaching detailing God's vision and heart for unity and diversity must be given and understood at least by the leadership of a church, if not the whole congregation. Furthermore, one must recognise one's own biases and be willing to sacrifice one's cultural comfort. Roach and Birdsall prefer the term 'cultural humility' to 'cultural competence' (Roach and Birdsall, 2022). Acknowledging bias and sacrificing culturally is undoubtedly more difficult for those of the majority culture, who may have never experienced being an outsider or even have an awareness of the characteristics of their own culture, which are treated as the cultural norm.

Conclusion

Intercultural worship is an intentional pursuit which may emerge as a church organically develops. It can be constructed using the idea of allyship: a person comes alongside another to promote a common interest. Where there is an intentional crossing of boundaries and true friendship emerges between people of different backgrounds, a deeper understanding of what is in one another's heart develops. Consequently, true solidarity emerges in such a context. By overcoming our biases and resolving to love one another authentically, we can offer a sacrifice of praise to our God with one voice (Romans 15:5–6). Thus, intercultural worship is a natural response and an overflow of embodying an intercultural lifestyle built on the foundation of relationships and community.

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INTERCULTURAL (MULTI-ETHNIC) CHURCHES: A BIBLICAL MODEL

Canon Francis Omondi *is a priest of the Anglican Church of Kenya and a Canon of Kampala Diocese in the Church of Uganda. Francis serves as the international director of Sheepfold Ministries and Africa coordinator for Barnabas Aid International. He holds a PhD in Theology from the South African Theological Seminary, is Adjunct Lecturer at St Paul's University, Limuru and Research Tutor at the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life.*

Mention intercultural churches or multi-ethnic churches in this age of migration and movements of refugees, and what comes to mind is advocacy work on behalf of asylum seekers, refugees, Black Lives Matter, and inter-faith movements.

But in a society whose population is becoming culturally diverse because of migrants, the church misses the opportunity it offers to be light if these migrants are pressured to fit in the host society, to give up their culture, language, habits, and customs and to be assimilated into the mainstream culture.

Despite the challenge of societal change, migrants can accord us the opportunity to rediscover how to be a diverse human society and the body of Christ. This is the church's identity envisaged in the Bible. Therefore, the church should make migrants part of the body of Christ and not let them stay in segregated communities, separated from one another and the dominant culture.

The antidote for a segregated church is an intercultural church,[8] which Scott (2021, 51) considered "to make amends for the segregated church." For this article, I use the multi-ethnic church definition by Prof Paul Hiebert (1985, 3). He says that a multi-ethnic [intercultural] church is one in which there is (1) an attitude and practice of accepting people of all ethnic, class and national origins as equal and fully taking part as members and ministers in the church's fellowship; and (2) this attitude is manifested and practised by involving people from different ethnic, social, and national communities as members in the church.

The intercultural church has nothing to do with race or immigration. Therefore, I concur with Deymaz (Deymaz and Li 2010, 37), who argues that it is "not about racial reconciliation; it's about reconciling men and women to God through faith in Jesus Christ, and about reconciling a local church to the principles and practices of New Testament congregations of faith, such as existed at Antioch and Ephesus."

Is there a biblical foundation for intercultural churches?

The Antioch Church story lays down a foundational theological claim that functions as the cornerstone of an intercultural church. As the narrative unfolds, the triune God appears as the key player blessing the breaking of the boundaries in the believers' witness to the pagan Greeks and forming them into a renewed faith community. God endorses the message change from preaching Jesus the Messiah to Jesus as Lord amidst the multiple lords in the Greco-Roman backyard.

Luke's portrayal of the pattern of ministry at Antioch is the firmest model one can conjure in support of intercultural churches. In Acts 11 and 13, the Antioch church's story provides a conceptual framework for an intercultural church vision. This story begins with the Holy Spirit's impulse to include the Gentiles in God's kingdom. This church does not belong to a particular culture or people. Instead, it lays out the

foundational theological justification for an intercultural church. Driven by God's Holy Spirit, the believers who were Gentile proselytes to Judaism broke double ranks when they witnessed to the pagan Greeks and preached Jesus Christ as Lord.

Having fled the Jerusalem persecution, the believers arrived in Antioch, Syria, an important commercial city of the Roman Empire. It was a city with multiple nationalities and ethnicities, although within one nation, the Roman empire. Here, the believers had to be Christ's witnesses in this multi-ethnic community.

At Antioch, believers first went to the culturally attuned Jews, expecting them to recognise the Messianic message and the promise of scriptures. This was how they knew to testify. It was a given that the believers maintained the model of Gentile converts' assimilation.

Even though the Jerusalem church, from which they came, was multi-national and multi-racial,[9] the church remained monoculture, with Gentile members assimilated into Judaism. In Jerusalem, the believers conformed to the dominant religious and social cultures, although they were distinguishable by their ethnicities.

But some believers from Cyrene and Cyprus crossed over to witness to their kin, pagan Greeks, who would not have been the target for evangelism. This expansion forced an early expansion of Christian theology. According to Walls (2002, 217), these Christians "… made discoveries about Christ that were only possible when their deepest conviction about him was expressed in Greek and propounded using Greek indigenous categories and style of debates". They had to find genuine discoveries among the false trails and the shortcuts. They needed the insight and discrimination that are fundamental to scholarship.

Sent from Jerusalem to investigate this phenomenon, Barnabas saw the work of the Holy Spirit and encouraged it. As a result, he built the congregation on an intercultural premise. Barnabas then developed a multi-ethnic leadership team when he brought Saul from Tarsus and received prophets and teachers from Jerusalem, such as Agabus.

This church in Antioch was the first intercultural church with diverse leadership (Acts 13:1). They created an environment of cultural pluralism, where according to Scott (2021, 50), minorities could take part fully in the dominant society yet keep their cultural differences. In addition, they were intentional in building a diverse teaching team with minority teaching pastors and allowing them to preach from theologies that not only speak into their lives but the lives of the minority members of the church. In this example, the believers developed cultural pluralism by creating a culture of accommodation instead of assimilation (Yancey 2003, 31).

It proved difficult to define the Antioch church by its cultural or ethnic identity. Their identity was their actions, their message of Christ and their love for others. This was not an insular church but aligned their vision to the Holy Spirit's guidance to show the kingdom of God and acts of justice following the prophecy by Agabus. And they were sending out to the nations Barnabas and Saul. They were preaching about Christ and showed their love for one another, earning the title of Christians.

The Antioch church was reliant on the Holy Spirit's guidance. The Christian community was discerning and depended on direction from the Holy Spirit on how best to become a Christian community since this approach did not tether them to Jewish religious traditions. This discernment occurred communally, leading to Barnabas and Saul being set aside and sent out to the Gentile world (missions).

The Antioch church's influential role in the first monumental decision by the Council in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15, is obvious. They presented the agenda of the Gentile

church for discussion, and method of reaching the decision, and the discernment of the Holy Spirit's mind. Hence, Walls observes (2000, 792–9), they built cultural diversity into the Christian faith with the decree freeing the new Gentile Christians from observing Jewish religious culture as an entry condition. The decision to untie the church from Jewish religious culture shifted the authority reference from traditions and texts to dependence and discernment on the Holy Spirit's guidance on becoming a Christian community. For Antioch believers, it was a Hellenistic way of being Christian.

A witness in the community

The church at Antioch gives us an extraordinary model of an intercultural church to emulate. Their ethnic diversity guided their witness to the kingdom of God. Our witness of the kingdom should align with this reality when we find ourselves in ethnically diverse communities.

Are churches willing to change their worship, leadership, and ministry to embrace the diverse communities in their neighbourhood? But it begs to know whether these communities isolate themselves to keep their cultural identity or because they feel they have nothing to offer (Marzouk, 2019, 7).

Multi-ethnic disposition learnt in the Antioch church opened their eyes to justice. They were restless, seeking to accommodate others, and thus developed a sensitivity for others within and outside. They took seriously Agabus's prophesy and acted upon it. They used their power and resources to show the glory of God's kingdom. They mobilised the entire church for possible service and witness of the kingdom, employing these to pursue justice and righteousness and sending help to Jerusalem and Judea. Unfortunately, mono-ethnic churches blind us from seeing the needs of others.

Monocultural churches seek to preserve their peculiar culture. They strive to cut external influences and resist any form of change. Such congregations often assume a dominant culture that tends to assimilate minorities into the dominant culture (Marzouk, 2019, 18). From the Antioch congregation, the church needs to learn how to receive and offer from one another. Only then will it become a choice to assimilation not segregation. Marzouk (2019, 21) is right to say that the church only proclaims hope in a polarised and divided world when it becomes an intercultural covenantal community. So, this implies that the church must go beyond being monocultural or multicultural.

Conclusion

As long as our society is increasingly ethnically diverse, it will not be plausible to proclaim God's love for all people from an ethnically segregated community and churches. How can the church of Christ proclaim the dingdom of God from a segregated platform? Deymaz and Li (2010, 37) were right to question the logic and possibility of an intentionally divided and segregated church body to advance the Gospel of Christ. How would such a church be a witness to God's kingdom?

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LEARNING TO SERVE WELL IN INTERCULTURAL MISSION PARTNERSHIPS

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Why intercultural mission partnership?

Partnership in intercultural mission is about working together as participants in God's mission despite our diversity and differences, and providing space where each participant is a contributor. It is the recognition that our calling in mission is to join God in what he is doing. Therefore, every follower of Jesus seeking to obey God's command to make disciples seeks to contribute their gifts, resources, and experiences to make this happen. Despite the temptation to compete with or to try to outdo each other, we must learn to give up selfish ambitions for God's greater glory.

As we examine the life of the apostle Paul, he was a notable example of one committed to collaborative partnerships in intercultural mission. When writing to the Philippians in 1:3–8 and 4:10–16, some keywords concerning intercultural mission partnership include rejoicing, contentment, strength, giving, and receiving. Paul has an incredibly positive view of intercultural mission partnerships. He is keen to point out that a true intercultural mission partnership is mutual and involves giving and receiving. As Paul pens his epistle, he points out that effective intercultural mission partnership happens when there is vulnerability and openness, honesty and trust, respect and mutuality, giving and receiving, shared goals and values, and clear and regular communication between partners.

Within the body of Christ, some are wealthier, more educated, more experienced, or more exposed. Nonetheless, there remains only one body; within that body, there is equality despite a diversity of responsibilities, gifts, and means.

What should intercultural mission partnerships look like?

In the New Testament, we see intercultural mission partnerships described in numerous ways. In Ephesians 4:11–13 and Romans 12:6–13, it involves the sharing of gifts. God has given each believer spiritual gifts for the common good of the body of Christ. It becomes meaningless to try to hoard gifts or to be selfish in the use of them because the very purpose God gave gifts within the body was for the common good. One grows and develops as one uses gifts, which in turn contributes to the church growing towards maturity. Diversity of cultures requires and provides a greater diversity of giftings to enhance intercultural mission endeavours more appropriately.

Secondly, in 2 Corinthians 8:4–12 and 9–10, we see sharing resources as a demonstration of intercultural mission partnership. God invites each believer to be creative and productive in using their skills, talents, and energies, which, when used wisely, can create wealth. Sharing financial resources happens within the body of Christ through giving tithes and offerings that help support mission endeavours. Sharing of material resources demonstrates a mutual partnership with a commitment by all involved to identify with the needs of the other, even though the amounts given may vary depending on one's ability to give. By sharing resources, believers participate in the bond of unity found within the body of Christ. The

importance of this element is heightened in a true intercultural mission, where we must learn to serve alongside others who may be less economically resourced than us.

Looking closer to home, one challenge we have today is that most of the financial and material resources within the Church of England are found in non-UKME/GMH, dominant and affluent churches. In contrast, human resources, especially for intercultural mission, are increasingly found in less prosperous churches with a significant membership of UKME/GMH persons. Therefore, how these resources can be shared for the mutual benefit of all and the furtherance of God's kingdom remains challenging. However, the key in this respect is to do it through intercultural mission partnerships and networks in which co-sharing, co-leading and co-sending are central ingredients. Such intercultural mission partnerships require intentionality.

Thirdly, in Romans 5:5–10 and Philippians 3:10, we read about sharing experiences. Paul had in mind the transformative power of the gospel working in his own life. What starts at conversion continues through discipleship, where the follower of Jesus is increasingly formed into Christ's likeness. Many UKME/GMH people have much to teach their ethnic English brothers and sisters about following Christ in places of great adversity, danger, and hostility. Within the body of Christ, we ought to identify with each other in our successes and our sufferings. This is modelled around the hope the gospel provides as we consider Christ's death and resurrection. As we participate in intercultural mission partnerships, we must be willing to identify with his sufferings and triumph by the cross. Therefore, intercessory prayer for intercultural mission becomes the most critical piece of sending apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke to his disciples, asking them to pray to the Lord of the harvest for workers. As they obeyed him and began praying, God set them apart for the mission task and took care of the modalities of sending, even though the process was often fraught with difficulty.

How can we develop healthy intercultural mission partnerships?

The prerequisite for healthy intercultural mission partnerships is that all those involved are contributors and recipients. As we learn to give and receive, we must also learn to listen to each other even as we seek accountability. Clear and regular communication among intercultural mission partners builds trust and clarifies expectations and intentions. Communication is critical in intercultural situations where cultural differences can create tension. This includes Church of England churches working alongside each other in intercultural mission, with those among them with less economic ability.

UKME/GMH people who tend to emerge from more communal or collectivist cultures view resources as communal and naturally are more open to sharing them, while those people arising from individualistic cultures often find it much harder to share and be generous with what they have. To complicate things further, what accountability looks like differs from culture to culture. Therefore, there is a need for reflective learning to help those in intercultural mission partnership situations to enhance their cultural intelligence to respond more appropriately in such spaces.

Secondly, in healthy intercultural mission partnerships, people must view themselves as equal partners around a common vision and mission, in which money or distance travelled to the mission situation is not the only measure of what commitment to the intercultural mission partnership entails.

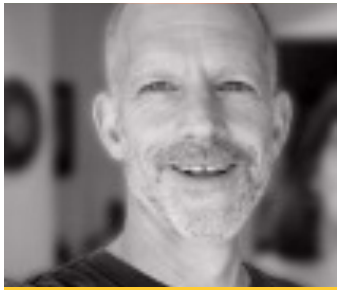
Thirdly, those involved in healthy intercultural mission partnerships need to value others above themselves. Jesus modelled identification with fallen humanity well by his incarnational living. Therefore, we need more intercultural mission partners who can enter a new culture and truly model a lifestyle that can be imitated.

Conclusion

Mutual collaborative partnerships are necessary for healthy intercultural mission endeavours. We must aspire to see them developed across all churches in the Church of England. It is an enormous privilege to respond to God's invitation to his Church to participate in his mission and ensure that those who have not yet been reached with the gospel can be invited to enter God's kingdom. This will require intercultural mission leaders and practitioners who are humble, servant-hearted, and good listeners and learners. They need to be fully committed to growing effective collaborative intercultural mission partnerships. With such a posture, there is an enormous potential to build strong intercultural mission teams where unity enables the mission community to work together to fulfil God's purposes for his church.

THE GOAL OF INTERCULTURAL MISSION IS TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT REACHING AND INTEGRATING ALL PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF THEIR ETHNICITY AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCE, AS THEY LOVE GOD AND LOVE EACH OTHER.

INTERCULTURAL CHURCH AND THE BIBLE: ESSENTIAL OR PERIPHERAL?



The Revd Dr Jem Hovil *is ordained in the Church of England and has been an associate mission partner of BCMS/Crosslinks for over 20 years. That has included significant time in Uganda and South Africa and further afield in theological education at the grassroots. Jem has co-led intercultural churches along the way. His cross-cultural involvement in theological education continues from the UK through leading the BUILD Partners charity, which supports the programmes of that name which he co-developed in East Africa. His doctoral research, conducted through Stellenbosch University, was in theological education and curriculum design.*

The concept of the intercultural church needs no defence – it is integral to the biblical witness. The Bible is an intercultural document about God's intercultural people, and readings of scripture from that perspective open up the text in new, fresh, and exciting ways. The concept, therefore, is a hermeneutical key to use rather than simply a topic to search out, with a magnifying glass in hand, as though it were just the concern of a special interest group.

This observation echoes Chris Wright's gentle dig that, 'As Christians, we need a biblical basis for everything we do'.[10] His comment, and the 'mild caricature' he goes on to develop of fervent mission-studies students, is set in the context of his wrestling with a course he taught and its title, 'The Biblical Basis of Mission'. He argues that rather than seeking a biblical justification for mission, we should be 'reading all scripture missiologically' as an exercise driven by the observation that *'the whole Bible is itself a "missional" phenomenon'* (italics original). This represents a shift from mission as a noun, a topic or, at best, an activity, to the 'missional' adjective or descriptor of God's grand activity in his world and his people's participation in it – a simple semantic change that represents a major paradigm shift in thinking. Missional readings of scripture and biblical theologies of mission are meant to walk side-by-side in conversation together, learning and growing as the journey through the Bible proceeds.

Similarly, the Bible is an intercultural phenomenon about an intercultural people of God. This arises from its multiple contexts and tensions, not least because the cross-cultural dimensions and implications of the gospel are so bound up with and integral to mission.[11] Therefore, the idea of an intercultural church is essential in the true sense: it is concerned with the very essence and nature of God's Church. The concept of reaching across boundaries with God's good news of reconciliation in order to establish new, integrated communities where fear of enemies is transformed into sibling love, for the love of God, is so integral to the mission of Jesus that the Bible's grand narrative would make little or no sense without it.

Further, contemporary accounts and instances of church or gospel without reference to or evidence of the barrier-breaking power of the gospel are, at best sub-biblical and, at worst, produce parodies of the church, formed not by the gospel but by the concerns of the world around them: little more than social clubs or something more sinister.

As one of the inaugural articles of this journal, this piece has the opportunity to lay out a little of the Bible's approach to God's intercultural people and the perspective it brings to the Bible. The intercultural nature of the people of God is a seam so rich and so integral to the scriptures that the article effectively writes itself. While some of those riches will be explored in future editions from multiple angles, here are a few thoughts to begin the endeavour in response to this simple question:

If you were asked to select a summary text that points to and showcases the intercultural nature of God's people, what might it be, and why?

It could be some verses from Genesis where it all began, written in a specific, ancient near-eastern intercultural milieu. More specifically, Genesis 12.1–3 might be your choice text, with its programme of promises of God's blessing extending to the nations. The passage is interculturally loaded, sitting so soon after the spread and diversification of language and culture by God's judgment and grace (Gen. 11.1–9). And those promises are made to migrants in northern Mesopotamia, making their way in a counter-clockwise and counter-cultural arc from the cultures of Ur towards those of Canaan (11.27–32). This foundational text has repeated echoes throughout the Bible as God's purposes progress, demonstrating the centrality of the theme.

Or, at the other end of the scriptures, you might select a passage from Revelation, where those promises find fulfilment. Written with totalitarianism bearing down and the heavens torn open to comfort Jesus' followers with a vision of God's future people, John sees 'a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb' (Rev. 7.9). It's a revelation from the edge of empire, of inclusion and healing in God's true kingdom achieved at a price through the suffering of the original martyr.

Or it could be one of any number of texts in between. From the Old Testament, you might choose the subversive and surprising story of Jonah and God's compassion on the archetypal enemy of God's people, the Ninevites. The love of God drives the narrative forwards with its insistence that Jonah is to go on a mission 'to the great city of Nineveh' (Jon. 1.2; 3.2).

Isaiah, too, spoke in quite shocking terms of the great enemies of God's people doing nothing less than worshipping together with them as a holy trinity (Is. 19.23ff). He makes it clear that xenophobia has no place among God's renewed people and foresees the beauty of the gospel of peace. Or you might choose a more general text from Isaiah, perhaps the less esoteric 49.6, building on the programme of Genesis 12 with the inclusion of the Gentiles, so that God's 'salvation may reach to the ends of the earth'.

Or it might be the beautiful, explosive, and carefully crafted story of Ruth the Moabitess – a living example of intercultural dynamics and biblical inclusion that leads deliberately into its concluding genealogy of David, God's own king, who turns out to be a man of mixed ethnicity, embodying and anticipating the hopes of a radically intercultural kingdom.

The emphasis on genealogy drives us onwards into the New Testament and Matthew's extrapolation of the line of David, not least with its ethnically improbable mothers who stand tall amidst the patriarchy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Uriah's wife (we all know who she was) so that Mary might be 'the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah' (Matt. 1.17). It's a genealogy that speaks volumes of and for the intercultural people of God.

Or you may well have selected a saying of Jesus the Messiah himself as being central and summary to the intercultural nature of God's scriptures. Perhaps you would choose his transformation of how the people of God are to relate to the oppressor: 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven' (Matt. 5.38–43). Or maybe his ultimate expression of that calling in the very face of those powers stripping and preparing him for execution: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23.24). No wonder Thomas Cranmer put the love of enemies at the top of his wish list of evidence of true heart transformation by the gospel.

Or you might have landed in the book of the ongoing acts of Jesus through his apostles, with its Genesis 12-like programme laid out in Acts 1.8 and its thumbnail sketch of the mission of God's intercultural people linked to the Pentecost event. Or perhaps Acts' boundary-breaking, barrier-shattering moment with the inclusion of the Gentiles – a people who had left a bad taste in Peter's mouth until a God-given vision revealed that a relationship with them in Christ was not something to swallow unwillingly but something to be savoured: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right' (Acts 10.34–35).

Or maybe you were propelled out of Acts and landed in the book that is its sequel in more than one sense: Paul's letter to the Romans. It is hard not to be drawn there, with mission as its heartbeat and its Jew–Gentile tension running throughout as hermeneutical glue. Romans 15.7, as a text that might unlock the book, is perhaps one that condenses the call to be an enemy-embracing, exclusion-excluding body: 'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.' It is a text that elicits a string of Old Testament texts from Paul on the theme of inclusion. That he then repeatedly quotes from the Hebrew scriptures underscores the sense that he has his finger on their pulse as he calls for those with power and privilege to give up their rights for the sake of their new siblings and to seek peace and pursue it.[12]

But for this author, the winning phrase comes from another masterpiece of Paul's, his letter to the Ephesians. It is one in which significant volumes of biblical thought on intercultural church coalesce and offers a key lens through which to read the Bible as a whole. It also contains a single, unique-to-the-New-Testament word (*hapax legomenon*) as a drawing point. Ephesians 3.2–13 text sits within a reiteration of Paul's exposition of God's reconciling purposes in something of a digression on his ministry. What an aside, and what purposes! It is an expression of God's plans for peace, not just for humanity but for his cosmos – plans in which his trump card is the one intercultural body of heirs-together-in-Christ. And within that section sits the phrase that forms verse 10, and within that, the unique summary word 'manifold' (*polypoikilos*) describing God's wisdom:

'His intent was that now, through the church, the *manifold* wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms….'

Peter O'Brien says, 'The compound adjective meaning "manifold, variegated, very many sided" was poetic in origin, referring to an intricately embroidered pattern of "many coloured cloaks" or the manifold hues of "a garland of flowers".'[13] So Paul's God-given vision is for a church of many colours that reflects and reveals God's ever-creative multifaceted wisdom, which is the gospel.

Embodying and living out that multiform rather than monochrome wisdom is essential to the church's witness, not just to the world in the limited sense but to the entire cosmos, the heavenly realms, to its powers, both good and evil: witnessing the divine power of a message that turns enmity to friendship, bringing a rich peace. An inclusive church is, in the fullest Christian sense, one driven by the purposes of God fulfilled in Christ, with highly disciplined and deeply sacrificial inclusion and embrace. It is a costly church, first to Christ, who has dealt decisively with evil and sin, and then to his people as they share in his suffering, not least through the hard graft of building bridges between themselves and others.

Conclusion

This all raises more questions than it answers, which is the point. Here is a journal to explore those questions and many more besides. But here, too, in this article is a pointer in a certain direction, not least in highlighting the intercultural nature of mission and scripture and the concomitant and essential intercultural nature of God's Church. Some of these questions will concern the various parts of scripture itself and the relationships between them: biblical theology if you will. Other articles will be around their implications, including questions of transformation, in the domain of practical theology proper. What does this all mean for the church, not least at the local level? How clear and acute and of what nature do those cultural differences need to be to qualify? What can we learn together as God's global church? And what does the language (multi-, inter-, cross-cultural, multi-ethnic, etc.) teach us, and how should it be shaped?

It will be a discourse, it is hoped, with an intention in tune with God's, so that 'through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known….'

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A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERCULTURAL LEADERSHIP

The Revd Naomi Hill *was born and bred in England's 'home counties' to white British parents. Nonetheless, awareness of different cultures was a natural part of her upbringing, especially when her family entertained students from other countries. She lived in Pakistan for seven months after university, teaching English. She has a Kenyan sister-in-law and two bicultural nephews. After a BA (Hons) in English Literature and History in York, Naomi worked in Cambridge and Sheffield, after which she studied for ordination at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, where she gained a BTh and was ordained in 2006.*

If Christians are in the business of building for the coming kingdom of God as NT Wright suggests, then the vision in Revelation 7:9–10 of a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb is merely the culmination of God's kingdom come, rather than a sudden step change in the configuration of his people. This vision can sound like a wonderful promise or an impossible challenge, depending on your current experience of encountering cultures other than yours. Nonetheless, whatever we feel, this challenge to look to build communities comprised of many earthly cultures is one of the tasks of following a Messiah who sent us out to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt. 29:19).

Before we look at a biblical perspective on intercultural leadership, it is helpful to define some terms. Firstly, a biblical perspective is based on the whole counsel of scripture – Genesis to Revelation – seeing within it the ebb and flow of God's revelation in specific cultures through time and space.

However, we must remember that there is only one good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, resting on one event, the death and resurrection of the divine Son. But the scope of that event, and of the gospel on which it rests, is beyond the most comprehensive description of it as experienced by any person or by a part of the redeemed creation… And since the application of the good news is greater than anyone's experience of it, we may well proclaim the good news in anticipation of a response reflecting our own experience; we find others responding in quite another way, but nevertheless hearing good news.[14]

In other words, the work of God in human history has many beautiful facets appreciated by different cultures. However, it is still one jewel: the redemption and reconciliation of humanity to God and each other through the cross.

Secondly, my working definition of intercultural means the interplay of cultures working together through mutual reflection, celebration and interrogation of differences and overlaps so that all are understood and all grow and change in understanding of themselves and others. We would hope in a Christian context; this means we forge together a more kingdom-shaped culture than those we were born into. In contrast, a multicultural church might be satisfied with the presence of different cultures but make no real effort to learn from each other and can stay 'siloed' in monocultural groups with no meaningful relationship between them.

And by leadership, we are talking about individuals and communities taking responsibility for their influence (recognising that every person has a field of influence, but you only become a leader when you recognise it and use it for a purpose), whether in any formally licensed or recognised role, paid or unpaid.

So, as we reflect on this great project that God calls the church into, what does the Bible have to teach us about how we may faithfully follow his call to lead it forward?

It seems to me that a biblical perspective on intercultural leadership begins with the assumption that we are rejecting the status quo and setting out for 'a better country'.[15]. We see this in Abram leaving behind the country and faith of his family and following the call of God 'even though he did not know where he was going', changing for good the life of his household and all who followed in his footsteps, whether by blood or by grace.

This commitment to growth and change affects our deeply held cultural assumptions, which can be incredibly challenging for leaders and the led. Many in our congregations and even our leadership teams cling to church as a place of comfort and safety in a rapidly changing world and might resist, rather than embrace, the promise of intercultural community. This desire for stability might be even more pronounced when we are migrants desperate for spaces where we are seen and understood, or even when we are 'natives' whose neighbourhoods are going through a radical transformation.

Change is hard and often unpopular because it is unpredictable and usually requires personal sacrifice. Thankfully, our predecessors in faith show us the way. The list of heroes in Hebrews 11 is a great summary of examples that we need to set before us as we welcome the things promised, still admitting that we are all foreigners and strangers on earth (v.13). Leading God's people into change and growth is the biblical expectation of leaders. Some of the most challenging changes are very often a result of reaching towards being an intercultural community because they shake our sense of identity so profoundly.

No wonder Paul had to encourage the intercultural Corinthian church to remember that in Christ we are one body and that 'there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.' 1 Cor 12:25–27

Of course, this expectation that we should honour and include people of all cultures adds another layer of complexity to leadership because it means that what is most immediately convenient and works for us as leaders should not be considered the way we'll always do things. The appointment of the deacons to serve the Hellenistic widows in Acts 6 is a prime example of this – the church had already got a system to provide for these women who could not provide for themselves, but (presumably because of language and cultural barriers) the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked. So, resisting the temptation to say: 'you just need to change to fit in with what we're doing', the apostles had the humility to endorse leaders from within the Hellenistic community[16] to attend to the problem, which not only rights a wrong but also seems to lead on to the number of disciples increasing 'rapidly' (v.7).

Finally, we see in our biblical antecedents the personal challenge that intercultural leadership bring us as leaders, where the comfort of our natal culture so often finds itself in tension with the call of God to transformation and sanctification. For example, we see in Peter him rising to the radical call to include Gentiles as Cornelius calls for Peter in Acts 10 and 11, with the vision and the reality of overturning the purity laws he had been brought up with. But not much later, we find Paul and Peter have argued over Peter's decision to stop eating with Gentiles to avoid controversy, which Paul sees as an affront to the gospel in Galatians 2. Being an example of intercultural leadership is not the path to popularity or a quiet life! In my experience, as in theirs, biblical intercultural leadership constantly challenges our identities and pushes us to a painful level of self-examination and reflection (a skill that some cultures might find easier than others?). We will find we have to listen more deeply, speak more clearly and appropriately, and

forgive and be forgiven multiple times, as misunderstanding and clumsiness are frequent occurrences. Nonetheless, these growing and painful times are precious opportunities to draw on God's mercy and grace as he helps us examine our cultural assumptions and privileges to discover a richer life of kingdom values.

So, as we look at some elements of a biblical perspective on intercultural leadership, we see that it challenges us to:

- Expect change and lead others through it, helping people to centre their identity in Christ rather than primarily in our natal cultures.
- Grasp the complexity of the challenge and assume our structures will need constant reformation and expanding culturally competent leadership as new cultures and language groups are integrated and cherished in our communities.
- Remember, we are part of God's work, and our hearts and lives as leaders will have to be reformed and remade in the light of all that we learn. We learn through stretching our listening skills, repenting, and forgiving mistakes and missteps on the road to an intercultural community.

Conclusion

The most important thing that a biblical perspective on intercultural leadership will teach us is that it is a journey and that through finding new depths to the gospel, by encountering each other and our cultures, draws us closer to Jesus and to becoming more like him. 'Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.' (2 Cor 3:16–18)

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All biblical quotations are from Today's New International Version, Hodder & Stoughton

ENDNOTES

1 See Corrie, J. (2014). The Promise of Intercultural Mission. Transformation. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378814537752

2 I list some of them on p 11 of my Grove booklet W236 on *'Worship in a multi-ethnic society'*.

3 Revd Dr Anna Poulson speaks of this as she is interviewed on ACross Culture podcast (Series 4, episode 3).

4 See Mark Labberton's foreword of Van Opstal's book, *The Next Worship*.

5 A good example of this is Azim Ast Name (www.songs2serve.eu/songs/azim-ast-name-to-isa)

6 Usually understood as those who are racialised as an 'ethnic minority'.

7 Such as www.songs2serve.eu and www.artsrelease.org

8 Interculturalism respects differences but creates a space for the interaction of diverse cultural groups within a society (Angnes M Brazal and Emmanuel S. De Guzman, *Intercultural Church: Bridge of solidarity in the Migration Context* (n.p. 2015 Borderless, 2015)

9 Although this is not a biblical term, when used in the Bible, the word refers to a family, nation, or generation of humankind. Many scholars today understand the race concept as a social construction, which has now been established in our literature of society. The term multi-racial tends to have a negative connotation; hence, it is not helpful for church ministry today.

10 Christopher J H Wright, *The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press 2006), 22.

11 See for example, Dean Flemming, *Contextualisation in the New Testament: Patterns for theology and mission* (Leicester: Apollos 2005). And, Michael J Gorman, *Becoming the gospel: Paul, participation and mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2015) 55, for a sense of the relationship between missional readings of Paul and how cross-cultural encounters sit in relation to and under those.

12 See Scot McKnight, *Reading Romans backwards: A gospel in search of peace in the midst of the empire* (London: SCM Press 2019). For instance, in commenting on Rom. 15.7, 'Welcome is the lived theology when division is the problem,' 42.

13 Peter O'Brien, ***The letter to the Ephesians*** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999) 245.

14 Patten, Malcolm *Leading a multi-cultural church* (2016, IVP) p.20 quoting Walls, Andrew, *The cross-cultural process in Christian History* (2002) p.20

15 Hebrews 11:8–16

16 All the new deacons in Acts 6:5 have Hellenistic names.

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