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Towards Beloved Community: Racial Reconciliation through Multiracial Missional Churches

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TOWARDS BELOVED COMMUNITY:
RACIAL RECONCILIATION THROUGH MULTIRACIAL MISSIONAL CHURCHES

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment of

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In memory

of my dear mother Raynor Kawamba (1949 – 2015)

Your life and dedication to God's mission inspired many, particularly me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.M. E	African Methodist Episcopal
Dr.	Doctor
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
Jr.	Junior
U.S.	United States

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Most Segregated Hour in America: Race relations in the American Evangelical

Church

“It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning, the same hour when many are standing to sing, “In Christ there is no East nor West.””¹ These words were used frequently by Martin Luther King, Jr., although others have also attributed the saying to people much before his time. Nevertheless, the significance of this saying is just as relevant in America today as it was when it was first uttered. These words were spoken out of the context of a racialized American society whose institutions were racially segregated during the period of the Jim Crow Laws in the southern parts of the United States. The Jim Crow laws came into existence following institutional slavery, and the implications of these laws had a sadistic effect on black people in the south to say the least. These laws legalized segregation in the south and governed any form of social contact across races.² “White children ride to school in buses. Black ones walk. From his birth, when he’s born in a Jim Crow hospital until the day he dies in a Jim Crow slum, is coffined by a Jim Crow undertaker in a Jim

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), 207.

² George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 111.

Crow cemetery.”³ The extent of the Jim Crow segregation in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century was such that the racial division was clearly evident in the one place that claimed to be a community of love, the church. Not only were the churches segregated, but as King stated, eleven o’clock on Sunday morning was said to be the most segregated hour in America. And as we will observe in this chapter, over the years it has become apparent that the racial divide among churches in America is still clearly evident.

Although much has changed in American society regarding race relations in comparison with a few decades ago, there is still a need for urgent attention for racial reconciliation within the American Church. In his quote on the most segregated hour in Christian America, King also quotes a hymn composed by the English poet, John Oxenham⁴:

In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth⁵

The context of this hymn affords us the opportunity of understanding the purpose of Martin Luther King, Jr. in quoting this hymn. In these words, “One great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth” lies the centrality of King’s message, a message of love expressed through nonviolent resistance to racism. “King discovered an entire way

³ Ray Sprigle, *In the Land of Jim Crow* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1949), 8.

⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 292.

⁵ Ibid.

of life in Jesus' "Love your enemies,"." ⁶ This message of love also formed the basis for King's concept of the beloved community. A concept which King himself found in the philosopher-theologian, Josiah Royce.⁷ As we shall see in chapter three of my thesis, the concept of the beloved community is of great importance as we consider the subject of racial reconciliation as it sets the premise for an incorporation of a multi-racial Christian community into the missional church conversation. The purpose of this incorporation is an attempt to make the vision of the beloved community a reality in the racialized society of America. In my thesis I will argue for the "practice" of the beloved community as a step forward towards ending racial divisions and discrimination in the American church and society.

A Historical Perspective on Race Relations in America

The subject of race has been part of American history since the arrival of White Christians to New World in the early to mid-fifteenth century.⁸ As the first African slaves set foot in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619⁹, they were entering a "New World" that would categorize them not as human beings but as racial beings. They had now become part of a racialized society. America was yet to remain a racialized society dominated by racism towards black Americans who had come to America as African slaves. Prevalent in this

⁶ Gary Simpson, "“Changing the Face of the Enemy”: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Beloved Community," *Word & World*, Vol. 28 (2008): 58.

⁷ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 2, 11. Royce was a Christian philosopher at Harvard University in the early twentieth century, and most of the philosophical aspects of King's beloved community ethic already existed in Royce. However, King went well beyond Royce in depicting the actual concrete nature of such a community.

⁸ Dwight Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 118.

⁹ *Ibid.*

racist mentality of the White Europeans was the belief that black people were an inferior race.¹⁰ This belief had many implications which included racial segregation. Racism in America is as long as the history of the existence of America itself, and although black history is taught separately from American history in some schools, I believe it is safe to say that black history is actually American history. Throughout the years the face of racism in America may have changed, but the implementations of a racialized system have not ceased. Racism, as Tony Campolo puts it, is based on the assumption that blacks are inferior and whites are superior.¹¹ This assumption provides a framework for our discussion of race relations in my thesis. As we explore the race problem, the racial divisions in the Evangelical church, and the steps forward towards racial reconciliation, the premise for this study will be built on this understanding of racism. The understanding that racism comes from the assumption that whites see themselves as superior to blacks.

In his book, *The Christian Imagination*, Jennings gives context to the racialized society in America from a more historical theological perspective. Jennings creatively pursues this goal by weaving into the narrative of his text the lives of several people living as Christians during the different periods of the early colonialist moment.¹²

I find Jennings work in the Christian Imagination to be very compelling because he

¹⁰ Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1* (London & New York: Verso, 1994), 5. The use of the word “race” is here in reference to the social construct in the American society that judges individuals based on their ethnic orientation as being either “black” or “white.” Allen discusses “race” as a prejudice that originated in the discriminatory social atmosphere of the early seventeenth century.

¹¹ Tony Campolo and Michael Battle, *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 3.

¹² Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and The Origin of Race* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), 9.

undertakes the task of unveiling the different circumstances in history that played a major role in shaping the future of race relations in the American society. One of Jennings' main themes central to his text is the theme of displacement resulting from the slave trade of African bodies.¹³ Jennings explains this displacement from both a theological and anthropological perspective resulting in what he calls the "diseased social imagination."¹⁴ For the white Europeans in the fourteenth century, this displacement had theological implications resulting in supersessionism, the replacement of Israel as the divine elect people of God. No longer was Israel seen as central to the development of Christian life, but the European white identity was now fully positioned with Christian identity.¹⁵ This pattern of displacement had far reaching consequences for the history of the new world. Evidently, the racial scale was to then be the determining factor of worth, civilization, intelligence, and Christian identity of people.¹⁶ The theological displacement put white Europeans in place of Jews and made them the chosen race by God. Not only did this justify the ongoing slave trade, but it also had implications on colonialism and western imperialism. An understanding of this historical perspective on race relations helps us to see the progression of the race problem that had far reaching consequences in the "new world". The early development of "whiteness" meant that all other races were secondary and subject to domination by the white race.

"Whiteness was being held up as an aspect of creation with embedding facilitating powers. Whiteness from the moment of discovery and consumption was a social

¹³ Ibid, 22.

¹⁴ Ibid, 9.

¹⁵ Ibid, 33.

¹⁶ Ibid, 58.

and theological way of imagining, an imaginary that evolved into a method of understanding the world.”¹⁷

This distorted understanding of whiteness further encouraged and justified colonialism, imperialism and the institution of slavery. It encouraged the existing slave trade and the shipping of African bodies from the “old world” to the “new world”, where they would be forced into slave labor to profit the white European’s agenda. The religion of Christianity itself would continue to be shaped by this diseased social imagination resulting from theological and anthropological displacement. Supersessionism had implications on the interpretation of scripture itself. For instance, the key figure in Christianity itself, Jesus Christ, had a distorted image. The image of Jesus was no longer that of an Afro-Asiatic Jew, but now his image had changed into the depiction of a white Jesus.¹⁸ “It would seem that Jesus was permanently cast in a white image to support European colonial expansion and the capture and enslavement of black Africans. A white Jesus served the purpose of being God’s stamp of approval on the actions of white people.”¹⁹ This, and many other modifications to the bible message, had been made in order to further progress theological distortions in justification of white domination.

A Historical Perspective on Racial divisions in the Evangelical Church

The Evangelical movement has for a long time been known as one that has been characterized by evangelism of “lost souls” and discipleship.²⁰ Although some might

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Coming Together in the 21st Century: The Bible’s Message in an Age of Diversity* (Valley Forge PA: Judson Press, 2009), 54.

¹⁹ Ibid, 55.

²⁰ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21.

trace the beginnings of Evangelicalism to the first Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, I think it is safe to say that the origins of the movement can be traced back a little further before the Great Awakening. The Evangelical movement's beginnings were in the form of 'sects' as opposed to religious institutions. These 'Sects', as Finke and Stark state, were religious bodies that sought to shift their attention from this world to the next, and by so doing becoming "other-worldly".²¹ The growth and spread of religion in America and beyond were a result of these religious bodies which focused on personal piety in the abandonment of institutionalized religion. The Great Awakening came about as these sects took on a Charismatic nature as they sought to bring revival in the hearts of men.

"Evangelicalism began as an effort to revive religious practice in the state churches of the British Empire. But within two generations the pursuit of true religion carried evangelicals beyond traditional patterns centered on inherited ecclesiastical forms and, in fact, was beginning to push them into unevangelized areas of the globe where first-time proclamation rather than revival was the central concern."²²

For quite some time, the evangelization of slaves was not a priority for evangelicals because of the belief that they were less than human and therefore did not consist of souls.²³ However this eventually changed and as a result slave owners sought to "convert" their slaves. Slaves would eventually accompany their masters to church and camp meetings but were designated a place to sit in the balcony of the church.²⁴ People

²¹ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 44.

²² Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 192.

²³ Emerson and Smith, 22.

²⁴ Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 26.

who entered the church were clearly divided by race; whites sat in the main area while black people sat in the balcony of the church. The abolition of slavery meant that separate churches for blacks were inevitable as they sought to be in an environment of worship that assured them of liberation and self-worth. Black churches were obviously formed with their race in mind as they to develop and maintain their own black identity in opposition to white churches. As it is obvious by now of the distortion of theology to suit the white race's agenda, black churches being established was in a way a deep cry for liberation. These roots of racial divisions in the evangelical church are still apparent today. Racial divisions within evangelicalism came because of the reluctance of evangelicals in being counter-cultural, and also because the dichotomy that white evangelicals created between the spiritual and physical existence. It is easy for us to see how those who were in that context of slavery in the seventeenth and eighteenth century would emphasize the "salvation" of souls at the expense of cultural and social issues in order to secure institutional slavery. Evangelical preachers who preached to black slaves reassured the slave holders that they would strictly emphasize their gospel message on the soul and on the life here after. The emphasis with these preachers, as with other was on the salvation of slave souls, and this is a dichotomy that was observed long after slavery in America. As I have already stated, the emphasis in the white evangelical movement has always been on evangelism, and this has had consequences on movements such as the civil rights movement that sought racial justice during the era of the Jim Crow laws. It has been noted that after Martin Luther King Jr's famous "I have a dream" speech, the great Evangelical leader Billy Graham responded by saying, "Only when Christ comes again will little white children of Alabama walk hand in hand with little

black children.”²⁵ Only when we have an understanding of evangelicalism will we be able to understand Billy Graham’s perspective on this famous speech.

In their book, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, Emerson and Smith analyze the racial division in the Evangelical church through studies, surveys and face-to-face interviews with contemporary evangelicals.²⁶ Two points are worth noting in Emerson and Smith’s analysis of racialization in the church. Firstly, the authors state that 90 percent of Americans who call themselves Evangelicals are white.²⁷ Secondly, they point out that approximately 90 percent of African Americans attend predominantly Black congregations, while about 95 percent of white Americans attend predominantly white churches.²⁸ A Pew Research study conducted in 2014 showed almost similar statistics with most Protestant churches having about 80-90% white Christians, with the exception of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention and the Church of God in Christ who all have exclusively black members also ranging from 80-90%.²⁹ The American church is still a racially segregated church. From Emerson and Smith’s survey, it’s interesting to note that most evangelicals in America are white. Where as in the past this used to be a non-negotiable, based on Jim Crow Law and the institutionalized racism that existed during that time, the problem of racial division still exists in the church today long after the Jim

²⁵ Michael O. Emerson, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 22.

²⁶ Emerson and Smith, ix.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 16.

²⁹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>

Crow law. It would seem that often times freedom and desegregation does not guarantee integration and racial diversity in the American religious life today. Just because certain laws that restricted interracial relations were ended in the past this in no way meant that people of different races would eventually come together. There still exist racial barriers in the church due to the fact that people still normally prefer to be with people of the same race. In a 2013 article in the *Journal of Missional Practice*, Malawian theologian Harvey C. Kwiyani states:

The American church is more segregated than schools and offices. Yet, we act as if that is the way things are supposed to be. We do not talk about race. It is a sacred cow. I have heard many ministers say about race and the church, ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ I am often tempted to push back, ‘Excuse me, mister, a segregated church is a broken church.’ Of course, Christian segregation is not just a social or cultural problem, it is a theological problem that reflects our understanding of God.³⁰

This understanding of God obviously has a narrow perspective of who God is and the desire that God has for diversity and inclusion, a subject that I will address more thoroughly in the chapters that follow. This theological problem that Dr. Kwiyani mentions ultimately led to the construction of Black Theology that, among other things, sought to contextualize the gospel message in light of the black experience.³¹ Historically, one difficulty that blacks faced with the religion of the white man was reconciling the gospel message with their experiences. To be in church with slaveholders on Sunday and get beaten by them on Monday was quite a contradiction to the slaves.³² It would seem that it was difficult for slaves (blacks) and slaveholders (whites) to worship

³⁰ Harvey C. Kwiyani, “Mission, Multiculturalism, and The African Immigrant Church: A Rapid Response to Faith without Borders,” *Journal of Missional Practice* (2013), 2.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Campolo and Battle, 14.

together based on both theological and experiential reasons. In the nineteenth century, things began to change as institutional slavery came to the end and black churches also began to emerge; notably the A.M.E church and the National Baptist Convention.³³ Campolo and Battle argue, therefore, that not only black theology but likewise the development of the black church was a result of racism. “Those who consider themselves part of the black church identify themselves as such because of their shared oppressive history of slavery and its antagonistic relationship to Christianity”.³⁴ I believe that historically though these were the roots of the contemporary racial division in the American church, today this has unfortunately been accepted as the norm. The white church and the black church respectively have developed their own culture over the years, with their own unique preaching styles, musical preference and other cultural forms that have created their own distinct identities. The cultural differences that exist between white and black churches have been preserved and even nurtured due to their homogeneity. Some today might choose to worship or attend church within their own racial groupings because of such cultural preferences like music, dress-code or style of preaching, because they individually have been raised and nurtured in that particular ethnic group. Our particular cultural preferences that might contribute to the type of church we choose to attend is also due to the persistent racial divisions in the church. And so the overall root cause of the persistent racial segregation in the church today is primarily due to the history of racism which eventually led blacks to seek freedom in worship through the establishment of their own separate churches. Simply put, the black

³³ Ibid, 14.

³⁴ Ibid, 16.

church ultimately formed in response to the racism in America that was clearly expressed through slavery and the Jim Crow “separate but equal” laws. And as Campolo and Battle point out, it was good for blacks to develop their own theology, and even establish their own churches because this would help them in a sense recover their cultural roots which was vital to the dignity of the black people³⁵, a dignity which was so often victim to white brutality and oppression. However, the contemporary issue which confronts the church in America today is that long after institutional slavery and segregation in America, the Evangelical church still continues to be racially divided. Long after institutional racism in America, and the enforcement of “freedom” and “liberty”, white Christians and black Christians still prefer to worship separately. Racial segregation in the church still persists today in America, and in the Evangelical church, to be more specific.

We live in a world in which globalization continues to be on the rise, secular societies and neighborhoods are becoming more and more diverse. And while diversity increases, most congregations in America remain homogenous. As the immigrant population in America continues to increase, one can easily assume that this will inevitably lead to more and more diversity in congregations, but instead churches remain monoethnic as congregations continue to reflect a majority of one ethnic group. We cannot easily assume that because of globalization and increasing diversity in the American society, churches will likewise become multiethnic. Sadly, as neighborhoods becomes more diverse, monoethnic churches will continue to be established unless there is intentionality in pursuing diversity within congregations. As I have stated above, the

³⁵ Ibid, 25. Campolo’s argues that particularizing the gospel threatened its relevance as a gospel for all cultures. There existed a tension between universality and particularity due to the existence of racial oppression, and this lead to the narrow perspective of a hegemonic Christ which slaveholders offered to slaves and for which blacks sought to discount.

were different factors that contributed to racial divisions in the church. The most important factor was because of racism during slavery and the Jim Crow law. However, the black and white racial divide in the church in the nineteenth century has led to fully established black churches. The white evangelical churches have always been in existence in America for perhaps as long as the pilgrims first arrival to the New World in the seventeenth century. And evangelical theology itself has developed since the Great Awakenings. The institutionalized church has always been firm in its roots and its theology has always been firmly established. As I stated earlier, in order for the Great Awakening to take place in the West, it took place through “sects” as opposed to the institutionalized church. Since the “white church” could not fully accommodate black slaves during the period of slavery, at the opportune time the inevitable happened. Blacks left the white churches and established their own black churches and religious organizations.

I believe that the pursuit of diversity in congregations that are in diverse neighborhoods, as we will see in chapter two, has substantial biblical basis. We can easily identify the biblical basis for multicultural, multiethnic congregations in the Bible. However, the pursuit of such diverse congregations in America will require intentionality and persistence. Long is the history of racial division in the church and in order to change this pattern there will need to be both effort and sacrifice on the part of both white and black Christians in America. Earlier I mentioned that the first Great Awakening was quite central to the spread of the Evangelical movement that further established the evangelical church in America. However, this great revival that took place in American in the eighteenth century also played a role in bringing whites and blacks together in one

worship space. More blacks now attended church and revival meetings with white people. “The number of African American members of Protestant denominations rose impressively in the wake of the revivals of the eighteenth century.”³⁶ However, a separation between whites and blacks was soon to be noticed as blacks did not have as many rights as whites.³⁷ This illustrates to us that the racist mentality can still exist even in a seemingly multiracial environment and there needs to be a lot of intentionality to maintain the inclusiveness of all races. History is indeed a great teacher as it cautions us about the possibility of repeating itself. It is possible to have black and white Christians in the same space, but just because they are in the same space does not mean that the place will be void of racism, discrimination or segregation. There needs to be more that has to be done to ensure that genuine, authentic multiracial community is taking place. There needs to be a mutual theological understanding of who God is and who He has called us to be. There needs to be a good understanding of what the kingdom of God looks like ethnically. And there needs to be a good theological understanding about the value of each humanity between races. Racial reconciliation is more than just bringing people of different races together in the same place. Racial reconciliation is more than just finding ways of accommodating black people and white people in a sanctuary. In her book, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice*, Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil offers a helpful definition of reconciliation:

³⁶ Emerson, 12.

³⁷ Ibid, 13.

Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish.³⁸

Based on Dr. McNeil's definition of reconciliation, racial reconciliation would be an ongoing process restoring broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for community. Racial reconciliation is an ongoing process that will require practice, effort and sacrifice. It is an ongoing process of forgiveness from America's racist past, and it is an act of repentance turning away from the ways of the past in order to embrace a new future, a new place where the church has not yet ventured. And while this racial reconciliation is being sought, the church needs to let justice reign in its midst. Racial reconciliation in the church needs to reflect this authentic restoration of broken relationships that will eventually reflect the Kingdom of God, or as Martin Luther King, Jr puts it, the Beloved Community.

Conclusion

In Summary, the existence of racial divisions in the majority of Evangelical churches in America is the historical consequence tracing back to the racialization of the American society. Even though slavery and racism had a lot to do with the Christian religion, its effects helped to shape the American church. At the center of the existence of the Evangelical church is the belief in the "good news" of salvation brought to sinners by Jesus Christ, and in the eighteen and nineteenth century, white Christians came to the realization that black souls were just as much in need of evangelization as white people. And so, through the great awakening and other historical events, blacks began to join

³⁸ Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 22.

white Christians for worship, although they had restrictions as well as limited rights in the church. And as I have noted in this chapter, eventually blacks formed their own church where they could have more liberty in worship and affirm their own black identities and African heritage. And throughout the years, from the Jim Crow and Civil Rights era, the Evangelical church has remained racially segregated in the midst of its proclamation of the good news of salvation. The individualism found in Evangelical theology has further contributed to churches remaining racially divided, even though the very biblical foundations that Evangelicals claim to be founded on contradicts their practice. Biblical theology upholds unity, love and liberty in worship. And as we shall see in Chapter two, there is a biblical basis for unity and oneness across races in the Christian community, and there is a challenge for the Evangelical church to not only live out this biblical mandate, but also to carry its message and be a living witness to a broken and divided world.

CHAPTER TWO
OUT OF MANY, WE ARE ONE IN CHRIST: A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR
MULTIRACIAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Introduction

We live in a world that is subject to constant cultural and societal change with every new generation that arises. And because of this the Evangelical church and its theology are confronted with the challenge of coping and adapting to this constant social change. Contemporary culture already has great influence on the life of the church, and although some might argue that Christian identity, which is central to the church, has its own distinctiveness which distinguishes it from secular culture, that line of distinguish is not easily traceable. The church, in a sense, is part of culture and its life and practices are greatly influenced by it.¹ However, the contemporary Evangelical church more specifically in the west has a unique challenge, one of racial and cultural diversity. This challenge is also termed as an adaptive challenge by Heifetz and Linsky because it calls for new discoveries and adjustments from the church or Christian community.² This adaptive challenge can be faced by a monoethnic church in a city that is increasingly becoming diverse, and the church is confronted by some decisions which will either adapt

¹ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 108. According to Tanner, the complications of setting “cultural boundaries” between the church and the world exist because we cannot identify or clearly push some practices on either side of such boundaries. She states that “the Christian identity itself is essentially relational,” Ibid.

² Ronald Abadian Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership On the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13.

to the changing demographics or maintain its homogeneity. This type of challenge can also be faced by a church in the suburbs whose neighborhoods are undergoing a racial transition. But regardless of the situation, whether it concerns an organization or community, this adaptive challenge will be a necessity for those communities or churches who would like to maintain their relevance in society. The necessity of this adaptive challenge is of necessity for the evangelical church as an organization that claims to exist for the purpose of conveying the good news of Jesus Christ to the society around it. As I have briefly mentioned, the issue at hand for the contemporary church is, how will it respond to a society that is increasingly becoming diverse and multiethnic?

There are a lot of factors contributing to the increased multiculturalism and multiethnicism that is taking place in the American society and the world at large. This increased diversity is something that is unstoppable and should simply be accepted as part of social change taking place in the world today. This social change and increased diversity that is taking place in America, for instance, among other things is due to globalization. In the book, *Globalizing Theology*, Paul G. Hiebert states that the globalization that is taking place in the world today is inevitably having an impact on the church, leading people in the church and the Christian community to come into contact with people of other ethnicities and cultures. He states that:

In the last decades, the world has rapidly become interconnected through travel, trade, communications, immigrations, and political interactions. At a fundamental level, this globalization has led to people meeting others who are different from themselves, raising questions of how they view and relate to others and otherness. Specifically, how should Christians respond to the impact of globalization on the church?³

³ Paul G. Hiebert, "The Missionary as Mediator of Global Theologizing," in *Netland, Globalizing Theology: A Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 288.

America itself is rapidly becoming a very diverse and multicultural nation in comparison to a few years ago. “The diversity of cultures and the worlds they represent have long been coming into contact with one another, especially in urban areas but even in places not once seen as diverse.”⁴ People of different races are more likely to come into contact with one another on a daily basis than they were in the past. Some statistics have projected that by 2050 white Americans will no longer make up the majority of the U.S. population,⁵ and by 2060 there will be no clear majority population.⁶

The globalization that has been taking place, and the increased diversity that comes as a result of it, has theological implications on the church. The evangelical church is confronted with a task of re-theologizing in order to deal with and adapt to the changing social climate. This task of re-theologizing will have to be one that is no longer dominated by European male mainstream theology, but one that is inclusive and takes heed to other theological voices from different minority groups. This task is one that is motivated by the belief in a biblical theology for multiethnic/multiculturalism. As we have seen in chapter one, the distorted cultural intimacy that Jennings addresses in his book *The Christian Imagination*, had its roots in slavery and colonialism. When the Europeans came into contact with the “otherness” of the Old World, there was a sense of Western superiority⁷ that was clearly evident in their interactions with the Africans, due to western development through science and technology. This in turn led to western

⁴ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics of Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 11.

⁵ Curtiss DeYoung, 2.

⁶ Conde-Frazier, Kang and Parrett, 11.

⁷ Ott and Netland, 290.

domination resulting in colonialism and imperialism. When humans come into contact with “otherness”, the human interactions that follow has the possibility of being distorted. Over the years, there has been continued racism leading to racial segregation and racial divisions in the church due to inability of knowing how to respond to the “otherness”. But in a world that is rapidly becoming more diverse and multicultural, the church is going to have to step up and be a witness to the Kingdom of God on earth. And since Christian theology is central to Christian life, the church would need to ground their desire for diversity on biblical theology. The church will have to address diversity from a biblical perspective as it seeks to be a driving force in racial reconciliation. The church needs to know how to respond to multiculturalism and race problems not simply by providing technical solutions. The task of pursuing diversity in congregations is not one that can be dealt with by simply providing solutions that treat race problems as a technical problem. The pursuit of diversity and racial reconciliation in the church will not be achieved by simply looking to the leadership of the church for answers and direction. This is an adaptive challenge that will require an entire organizational adjustment, and involvement from the entire congregation starting with the leadership. Central to this congregational transformation and pursuit of diversity will be a firm conviction that it is God’s desire to see His church embrace people from all ethnicities and cultures. The church needs to realize the necessity and urgency in seeking racial reconciliation as a mandate from God. Throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, there is a message of reconciliation and diversity. There is a message that lets us know that God’s story of redemption is for every nation and tribe, and that regardless of ethnic or cultural background, God’s people are all one in Christ.

The Origin of Humanity as One

As we consider the biblical basis for oneness across different races/ethnicities, there is a sufficient amount of evidence pointing to God's will for unity among people of different races. The biblical metanarrative gives account of God's purpose for the redemption of humanity comprised of people from every nation and tribe. But one area of focus as a starting point for the biblical basis for humanity's oneness is Genesis 1 where God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness....so God created humankind in his image."⁸ In this record found in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, we see that humanity originated from God Himself. God created the first two human beings, Adam and Eve, who in turn were fruitful and multiplied by reproducing other humans. In Genesis 9 – 10, a narrative of the life of Noah is presented to us, and how this oneness of humanity continued through Noah following the flood. The Biblical narrative then takes us through the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, and we see how this one humanity then spread to become diverse in culture, ethnicity and language.⁹ This eventually became distorted as time progressed, and ethnicity, language and culture became a source of division and classification. As humanity has lived through the middle ages, modernity and postmodernity, these divisions have become clearer and more evident. Throughout history, these divisions have even encouraged misinterpretations of the Bible to justify certain inhumane acts. But in spite of this, the biblical narrative has offered a clear explanation on the origin and oneness of humanity.

⁸ Genesis 1:26.

⁹ DeYoung, 10.

It is clearly evident that according to the bible, there is one race – the human race.¹⁰ As the existence of humanity progressed over the years, leading up to the Enlightenment period in Europe, and the birth of slavery in the Old World, the idea of the human race as one was no longer acknowledged. Race eventually became a social construct that categorized human beings based on skin color. This idea of race has evolved over the years and has become fully established in the lives of people in America. White people and black people are no longer seen as brothers and sister, but are separated based on societies definition and categorization of ethnicities. But as we have seen in Genesis, this is clearly not as God intended humanity to exist. When God created human beings, he created one race, and the saying “One human family, many cultural expressions” is to hold true.¹¹ In his book, *Theology for The Community of God*, Stanley J. Grenz states the importance of emphasizing the origin of humanity as one race:

The unity of humanity carries grave theological importance. It means that each of us stands before God as a participant in the one humanity. This common standing, in turn, entails several practical implications. It implies that all persons are equal in the sight of God. This principle provides foundation for our response as Christians to ethical issues such as justice, racism, etc.¹²

As we consider the biblical basis for oneness across different races and ethnicities, Genesis 1 is of great importance because it also points to the fact that all humanity is made in the image of God. As we have already noted, Genesis 1 emphasizes the fact that the human race is one and it originated from God Himself, as Genesis states

¹⁰ Ibid, 8. The term “human race” also refers to the human species or “oneness of humanity” as DeYoung discusses in his exposition of Genesis 1. The “human race” is the unity of humanity that originated from one creator, God, *ibid*.

¹¹ DeYoung, 28.

¹² Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 150.

that “God created humankind.”¹³ But Genesis 1 is also important because it speaks of the value of humankind in that humanity was made in the image of God. Scholars have written extensively on the subject of the *Imago Dei* (Image of God), and although there have been different perspectives on what this image of God means, there is a mutual understanding and agreement regarding the distinctiveness of humanity from other living creatures. Martin Luther is said to speak of this distinctiveness of humanity in his “Lectures on Genesis 1-5”, emphasizing that when God said, “Let Us make humankind”, this divine counsel marked the distinctiveness humanity.¹⁴ Stanley Grenz says, “The Genesis narrative has formed the fountainhead of several theological ideas. It suggests that the presence of the image of God separates humans from other creatures, for only we are created in the divine image.”¹⁵ Based on this assertion of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of humanity from other creatures, this would lead us to conclude that the human race, as image bearers of the divine being Himself are worthy of dignity. As humanity continues to interact and come into contact with each other, there needs to be a sense of respect and dignity in the interrelations of people from different races. We, as human beings are all made in the image of God and should therefore treat each other with dignity and respect. Having this biblical basis of the *Imago Dei*, regardless of ethnic heritage or cultural backgrounds should help us see racism and other forms of injustices as sin against God and fellow humanity. Our understanding of the *Imago Dei*, therefore, will have implications on the social relations of human beings. We are created in the

¹³ Genesis 1:27.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, “*Lectures on Genesis, Chapter 1-5*,” in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 1 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 62-63.

¹⁵ Grenz, 174.

image of God for the purposes of enjoying community amongst each other. Being made in the image of God means that we are created as relational beings to live in fellowship with God and with each other. Based on Genesis 1, God created humankind male and female so that they may enjoy community with each other. Therefore, human beings created in the image of God emphasizes respect and dignity for one another, and encourages relationality across ethnic heritage and cultural backgrounds.

The Nature of God's Kingdom

The book of Revelation is a book that gives us foresight into God's plan and future for the church. This book is said to be an "apocalypse" because it is a narrative consisting of visions disclosing heavenly information about the end of the world.¹⁶ The context surrounding these events was that of persecution and suffering faced by Christians at the hands of the Roman empire.¹⁷ "One major purpose of Revelation, therefore, was to offer comfort and encouragement to persecuted Christians by revealing the blessed future state of Christians who are faithful."¹⁸ The author of the book, John, is on the Island of Patmos where he gets a revelation from God.¹⁹ These revelations compel him to write down what will take place in the future, as John himself sees these things taking place in a vision. "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before

¹⁶ James Luther Mays, *Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 1300.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Revelation 1:9-11.

the throne and in front of the Lamb.”²⁰ This record of Revelation 7:9 tells us of this incredible sight that John saw in a vision. He saw a great multitude of people too numerous to count; and this multitude was made up of people from every nation, tribe, people and language. This theme of the oneness of the redeemed people of God continues throughout the book of revelation. There appears to be, in John’s narrative, a message of inclusion and unity. The prophetic nature of this book assures the readers of the inevitability of the fulfillment of God’s intention for humanity. The coming consummation of God’s kingdom will be made up of all ethnicities and cultures. “His kingdom is worldwide as well as everlasting.”²¹ The nature of God’s kingdom is multiethnic and extends to all God’s people across the world. And as we will see in Chapter three, this Eschatological nature of the book should not only give us something to hope for in the future, but it should give us something to live for in the present. In his book, *For The Healing of the Nations*, Justo L. Gonzalez states that:

The phrase, from every tribe and nation, thus has two meanings. In the first place, it has the meaning which we most commonly ascribe to it: in the end, when God’s will is accomplished, those who praise God and the lamb will be “from every tribe and nation and people and language.” But then there is another meaning which follows from this: from every tribe and nation means that this is the vision from which, out of which, the church must live.²²

The coming kingdom of God will be a kingdom made up of all peoples of the earth, and this message from the book of Revelation should direct the church today. It should inform us that God’s intention for humanity is to live in a community that is

²⁰ Revelation 7:9.

²¹ Judson Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1947), 293.

²² Justo L. Gonzalez, *For the Healing of the Nations: The Book of Revelation in the Age of Cultural Conflict* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 103.

multiethnic, a community that is seen for its diversity. And we have seen how at the beginning of the biblical narrative, there are messages of diversity and multiethnicism; and here at the end of the narrative that same message of diversity is being proclaimed. Whereas within the biblical narrative, salvation came from one specific ethnic group - the Jews. We find within this same narrative how God's agenda is ultimately for the salvation of all peoples of the earth. Jesus himself proclaims this just before his ascension into heaven in Matthew 28:19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations"; the word "nations" in the Greek is *ethne* which means ethnicity.²³ And so, Jesus himself commissions his disciples to carry the message of the gospel to all ethnicities. Therefore, the book of Revelation gives records of what is to be expected in the future; all God's people, from different ethnicities and cultures, coming together to worship God as one people. This kingdom, which is comprised of all peoples of the earth, is to be reflected in the church. The church today is to be a visible sign and witness of what is to come. "As the body of Christ the church is the eschatological people of God gathered out of all people, and it is thus a sign of reconciliation for a future unity of a renewed humanity in the kingdom of God."²⁴

The church as the visible sign and witness of the kingdom of God evidently should have implications on the race problem in the evangelical church today. This race problem, that we have clearly seen to be a social construct, is an issue that is contemporary to the culture in America today. And although the bible does not explicitly

²³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 64.

²⁴ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 116.

address this issue as being a black and white racial issue in the bible, clearly we have seen a concern for unity among races. The main ethnic issue in the bible, as we are yet to see in this chapter, was primarily between Jew and Gentile; and the book of Revelation lets us know that in the end all ethnicities – Jew and Gentile will be one, and will worship God as one. And this is the consummation of the kingdom of God that the church is anticipating; a kingdom of priests “from every tribe and language and people and nation”. There is no black or white, separate but equal, slave and master in the kingdom of God. There is no oppressed and oppressor, or rich and poor in the kingdom of God. But all peoples from every race, class and generation will worship the lamb of God as one. “All other marginalized Christians see themselves as God’s elect who are in the process of moving from the margins of society to the center of God’s kingdom.”²⁵ From John’s proclamation of every tribe and nation we see the reorientation of human beings as God’s chosen people and the restoring of a healthy society from a diseased social imagination. The biblical narrative, as we have seen, provides sufficient basis for multiracial Christian communities. In the book of Genesis, we have seen God’s original intention for humanity and how His desire was for it to flourish in all its diversity. And after the fall in Genesis 3, God still reasserts his will in that through His chosen people, Israel, he seeks to call all nations to himself by carrying out the work of redemption. And through one event in history, through the atonement of sins offered by his son, God seeks to restore that oneness of humanity through His son Jesus Christ. And as we will see in the remainder of this chapter, Christ’s body extends through space and time as He seeks to bring diverse people together as one body in order to reach the full stature of Christ.

²⁵ Conde-Frazier, Kang and Parrett, 94.

No longer Jew or Gentile: One in Christ

Quite a number of biblical scholars have written extensively on the unity or oneness in Christ that extends to all people of all ethnicities. The primary historical context that is so often used as the biblical basis for a multicultural Christian community usually comes from the cultural conflicts that existed in the early church between Jews and Gentiles. Paul addresses such conflicts in the book of Galatians, where he writes, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”²⁶ He also addresses this conflict in the book of Ephesians where he says, “In union with him [Christ] you too are being built together with all the others to a place where God lives through his Spirit.”²⁷ The events that took place in Acts 15 give more context to the social climate of that time and the tensions that took place between Jews and Gentiles. As the word of God spread from Jerusalem to Samaria, Ephesus, Antioch and other places, Jews now came into contact with Gentiles and as the Gentiles were being converted to Christianity, debates arose with regards to observance to Jewish laws. Were the Gentiles to observe Jewish laws or not? The Council at Jerusalem shows the tensions that existed between the Jewish society and the Hellenistic pagan society as both ethnic groups now professed to be Christians. The context in which Jesus himself lived was one that was greatly influenced by the Hellenistic culture. This Greek culture (Hellenism) influenced the economic, administrative and cultural landscape of Jewish life during Jesus’ era.²⁸ And so, the cultural conflicts that existed between the

²⁶ Galatians 3:28.

²⁷ Ephesians 2:22.

²⁸ Paul Barnett, *Jesus & the Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 48.

Jews and the Gentiles had been in existence for quite some time before the Early Church. Scholars have therefore formed a biblical basis for multiculturalism and inclusion through both the Early church narrative and the narrative of Jesus' life and how Jesus' ministry itself was inclusive. Biblical scholar Raymond Brown argues that Jesus becomes the ultimate interpreter of God's will, and that through the narrative of Jesus' life we can learn of what the Christian community ought to be and look like.²⁹ Brown discusses the "Matthean infancy narrative" and how the birth of Jesus is first revealed to Joseph, a Jew; and secondly the revelation of Jesus birth is then given to the Gentile magi who are eager to find this Jesus.³⁰ Joseph represents the Jewish community, and the magi represent the Gentile community, and the narrative shows us how God's will of having both a Jew and Gentile Christian community is seen through this narrative of the bible.

Biblical scholar, Joachim Jeremias also seeks to provide some biblical basis for the inclusion and unity of ethnicities in Christ by focusing on the attitude of Jesus towards the Gentile mission. He seeks to begin with Jesus' environment and how he embodied the gospel for all nations. One of the stories that Jeremias focuses on is the narratives of Jesus' interaction with the Samaritans and how "Jesus wholly rejects any nationalistic sentiment of hate."³¹ The context surrounding the Jews relationship with the Samaritan was one of tension and hatred. These Samaritans were stigmatized because of their mixed race and they were categorized together with the Gentiles.³² Jesus's

²⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the apostles left behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 131.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 40.

³² Ibid.

interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4; his healing of the Samaritan leper in Luke 17, and his story of the good Samaritan in Luke 10 all give a clear picture and illustrates to the Jews his love and acceptance that extends across ethnicities. Even though the Jews animosity towards Gentiles might have appeared to be justifiable, the gospel forced them to confront these tensions and come together as one community. The Jews faced oppression from the Roman empire, threats of assimilation to the Hellenistic culture, and other injustices from government officials such as tax collectors; and yet Jesus' ministry provoked them into acting towards love and reconciliation.

Thus revolt against brutal suppression by the Romans was rejected and transformed into an illustration of the refusal to repent. This eirenic undercurrent is unmistakable. This disputed payment of taxes to the Romans is expressly legitimated and the tax officials who work alongside the Romans, those who collected tolls, are accepted. Both a tax collector and a zealot, a resistance fighter, are included in the most intimate group of disciples. Members of foreign armies are seen in a positive light. All this points to a readiness for reconciliation which transcends frontiers and culminates in the requirement to love one's enemy.³³

Jesus' ministry was therefore seen to be one of reconciliation and this reconciliation is easily observed in his attitude towards Gentiles, those who were considered to be enemies to Israel and a threat to loyalty to Israel's Yahweh. And it is quite evident that throughout the narrative of Jesus' life, these acts of reconciliation and acceptance that he illustrates were often times not easily accepted by the Pharisees and even his own disciples.

³³ Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Alban Books Ltd, 1978), 64.

Jesus' life and ministry alone provide sufficient evidence and biblical basis for this oneness that Christ brings in himself. As we have seen from these few biblical scholars, the stories of Jesus' encounter with Gentiles convey a message of acceptance and even reconciliation among different ethnicities. In these stories we find biblical basis for inclusion and multiculturalism among Christians. However, in my thesis I would prefer to use a different approach in providing a biblical basis for multiracial Christian communities. I believe that what will be sufficient for a biblical basis for multiculturalism will be to incorporate the historical and eschatological progression of the work of salvation and the biblical narrative of the story of redemption. And as we consider this approach, I find Andrew F. Walls argument to be quite compelling.

In his book, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History*, missiologist Andrew F. Walls speaks of the Ephesian moment – “the social coming together of people of two cultures to experience Christ.”³⁴ This Ephesian moment is based on Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians and it addresses the cultural conflicts that took place in the context surrounding the book of Ephesians. I find Walls' argument for a biblical basis for multicultural Christian communities to be compelling because he interprets the “body of Christ” in relation to time and space, and he emphasizes that the body of Christ is both cross-generational (time) and cross-cultural (space).³⁵

Firstly, the body of Christ is cross-generational because it exists across time. Walls begins his chapter on the Ephesian moment by emphasizing the Christian salvation

³⁴ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 78.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 74, 79.

as a historical event.³⁶ The incarnation and the crucifixion did not happen immediately after the fall in Genesis 3; there is a progression, a story that exists between the fall and the Christ event. Andrew Walls states that:

The fact that Christ continues to be formed in local Christian communities whose ways of life are quite different from the one in which the incarnation took place means that for Christians, “sacred time” is not confined to the period of the incarnation, but extends to the whole historical process in which the work of salvation goes on, Christ’s presence being demonstrated as he is received by faith.³⁷

This work of salvation cannot be isolated to one specific point or time in history, but it requires the whole biblical narrative in order to accurately interpret what God is up to. The body of Christ is embodied cross-generationally as different generations of people receive the word of God by faith. The body functions in time and its various manifestations across time are needed collectively in order for the fullness or completion of the body to be manifested. From Genesis up until the appearing of the Son of God, these manifestations of the body take place in different periods in history. The social reality of each period is different but the spirit of oneness is seen cross-generationally. This unity across time is also spoken of in Hebrews 11:39-40 where the author writes, “What a record all of these have won by their faith! Yet they did not receive what God has promised, because God had decided on a n even better plan for us. His purpose was that only in company with us would they be made perfect.” The different stories of God’s people in the Old Testament do not stand alone, and they are incomplete without contemporary Christians. God’s people across generations have all played their various roles in the Kingdom of God in order to fulfill God’s will for humanity. The historical

³⁶ Ibid, 72.

³⁷ Ibid, 74.

progression of the work of salvation shows us its collectiveness as it shows us that we are also one in Christ cross-generationally.

Secondly, Walls emphasizes that the body of Christ is cross-cultural as it is embodied by people of all nations and cultures. This speaks to the spatial dimension of the body of Christ, a theme that we find in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. The context surrounding the book of Ephesians is one in which current circumstances of the time have caused Jewish Christians to come into contact with Gentile believers. Christianity, which had its roots in Jerusalem, had come under heavy persecution in Acts 8 and this caused the believers in Jerusalem to flee and spread throughout Judea and Samaria. Among those who had fled the persecution were devout Jews who were raised under strict observance to the Mosaic Laws. As they found their place in different regions among different people groups, the early church faced new challenges that it had never faced before. The Jewish society was now confronted with people of a different ethnicity and culture, and as this new people group converted to Christianity the challenge was now either that of assimilation or integration. The work of salvation, which as we have seen was cross-generational now faced the challenge of being embodied in a specific social reality; a social reality in which Jews and Gentiles came in to contact with each other based on their mutual profession of faith in Jesus Christ. And Walls chooses a specific cultural element in this new social reality which would put to test the relevance of the gospel message in this cultural context. And this element was the meal table.³⁸ This was to be the test of true and authentic Christian community between Jews and Gentiles. They might have had the same faith, they might have believed the same gospel message, and

³⁸ Ibid, 76.

they might have worshiped the same God, but the true test of their fellowship and willingness for diversity would be seen by their response to the meal table. Biblical scholar Marcus Borg states that the meal table had a social function and would be used to express approval. “Sitting at the table with another was an expression of intimacy and fellowship; to invite people to a meal honored them and expressed both trust and acceptance.”³⁹ Paul’s confrontation of Peter in the book of Galatians is a good example of this cultural conflict seen at the meal table. Peter argued for the acceptance and liberty of the Gentile believers when it came to observance of Jewish laws, but he himself found it more convenient not to sit with them at the meal table when he was in the presence of his fellow brothers from the Jewish society.⁴⁰ All this proves the point that the true acceptance of diversity and a multicultural Christian community was to be seen at the meal table. But the book of Ephesians lets us know that when the Jewish and the Hellenistic societies came together because of their mutual profession of faith, having separate churches was not an option. They would seek to make an effort to come together as one Christian community in spite of cultural and ethnic differences. There was to be no Jewish church and Gentile church, but one Church under Christ. In the same way that “sacred time” extends to the whole historical process of the work of salvation, so too “sacred space”, the embracing of different ethnicities and cultures as one in Christ enables the work of salvation to be fully manifested, and the church then reaches “the very height of Christ’s full stature” (Ephesians 4:13). The book of Ephesians is central to us understanding oneness in Christ because it confronts these cultural conflicts that took

³⁹ Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Continuum International Publishers, 1984), 94.

⁴⁰ Galatians 2:11-14.

place during the period of the early church. It is a book that lets us know that the existence of homogeneity in the church should not be accepted as the norm. It lets us know that even though the Christians during the time of the early church had reason to remain separate because of ethnicities and cultural heritage, they had an understanding that separation within the Christian community would be against God's will. Andrew Walls further states that:

Christ is human, and open to humanity in all its diversity; the fullness of his humanity takes in all its diverse cultural forms. The Ephesian letter is not about cultural homogeneity; cultural diversity had already been built into the church by the decision not to enforce the Torah. It is a celebration of the union of irreconcilable entities, the breaking down of the wall of partition, brought about by Christ's death (Ephesians 2:13-18). Believers from different communities are different bricks being used for the construction of a single building – a temple where the One God would live (Ephesians 2:19-22).⁴¹

Paul's letter to the Ephesians provides sufficient biblical basis for diversity within the Christian community. As Walls mentions, this diversity is already being celebrated by the fact that Jew and Gentile Christians have come together because of Christ. The wall of partition due to different ethnic and cultural backgrounds has already been removed by Christ. The work of reconciliation has already taken place on the cross and is now being manifested in the life of the early church.

⁴¹ Walls, 77.

Conclusion

The Evangelical church in this contemporary American culture is faced with a challenge that is quite similar to that of the early church, and yet a challenge that is unique in its own way. The Evangelical church in America is faced with the consistent challenge of confronting racial divisions. As I briefly mentioned in chapter one, the church in America today continues to be racially segregated, and unfortunately for most churches this has been accepted as a norm for quite some time. Diversity between black and white Christians continues to be lacking in the church today, and there is a strong need for racial reconciliation towards an authentic multiracial community – a beloved community. It is very easy for people of different cultures to choose to remain separated as people always prefer to be with other people that are the same. The church today needs to take seriously the biblical message of oneness and unity in Christ. The church today not only needs to see racism and racial segregation as a problem plaguing the society, but there needs to be a realization that the persistent racial divisions among believers stands as a great hindrance to the advancement of God's kingdom on earth. God did not create humanity to celebrate uniformity, but he created humanity to flourish in all its diverse ethnicities and cultures. The way forward will not be to come together in the assimilation of one culture to another, or in the denial and abandonment of our diverse identities, but the advancement as one humanity in Christ will come when our differences are upheld and embraced by the other propelling us to the very height of Christ's full stature. The church in America today finds itself confronted by a challenge that existed during the period of the early church, but in a different social reality. The challenge the early church faced is different from the challenge in this contemporary culture in that the early

church's challenge was between Jew and Gentile – God's chosen people and the pagan world. The Jewish society was faced with a challenge of realizing that although they were God's chosen people, God had found pleasure in extending his kingdom invitation to the Gentile people. The Jesus community in Jerusalem faced the challenge of accepting the fact that God had extended his grace and call to the Gentiles.⁴² As we established in chapter one, racism in America is a social construction and results from a displaced theology tracing back to the sixteenth and seventeenth century. A reorientation of this theology results in us understanding that in America blacks and whites are all Gentiles who have been accepted into the kingdom by God's grace. The new contemporary social reality is one that differentiates people based on skin color instead of embracing these physical differences as part of God's beautiful and diverse creation. The need for racial reconciliation in the church today is great, and the bible has already made clear God's will for diversity and for Christians of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to come together as one in Christ.

⁴² Acts 10:15.

CHAPTER THREE
BELOVED COMMUNITY: ESCHATOLOGY, PERICHORESIS AND
RECONCILIATION

The ongoing need for true racial reconciliation

As we established in chapter one, the race problem continues to be prevalent in the American society today and the majority of the evangelical church remains racially divided. The United States of America continues to be plagued by racial injustice and the symptoms of this plague are identified through structural or systemic oppression as well as interpersonal relations. The struggle for racial equality has existed for centuries as minorities have continued to be subjects to segregation, prejudice and discrimination. Evangelical Christianity in America has not escaped the claws of this racialized society and has found itself an active participant in instigating racial divisions among black and white Christians. And as racial segregation has continued to taint the witness of the church over the year, throughout history people have arisen who have heard the divine mandate calling the church to unity. This desire and pursuit of racial reconciliation and multiracial congregations, as we will observe in this chapter, can be traced back to the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “Although racial division and white oppression of blacks is dominant in U.S. history, that history nevertheless provides

abundant examples that demonstrate the transforming power of the gospel.”¹ As much as racism is prevalent in U.S. history and racial divisions have existed in the church, we should also be aware of the fact that the desire to see racial unity and multiracial Christian communities is also evident in history. Over the years, many have taken heed to the call to pursue racial reconciliation within the church; and although the task has proven to be a great challenge, the efforts of these men and women have remained consistent over the years. Christian leaders and scholars have pulled from the wealth of biblical, philosophical and theological resources to further equip individuals and communities in the pursuit of racial reconciliation. The task of theologizing in order to equip contemporary Christians and the church remains great today. Constructing creative theology is still a necessity today for the sake of contextualization that is suitable and relevant for the social change in contemporary culture. It is in this respect, therefore, that I will discuss the question in this chapter: How can eschatology and Trinitarian theology inspire reconciliation through multiracial Christian communities that is the beloved community? In answer to this question, I will discuss in this chapter, 1) the progression of racial reconciliation through the years, 2) the implications of incorporating Jürgen Moltmann’s eschatology for implementing multiracial Christian communities, 3) a Perichoretic Trinitarian theology for multiracial Christian communities, and 4) Martin Luther King Jr’s philosophy of integration expressed through his vision of the Beloved Community.

¹ Dennis L. Okholm, *The Gospel in Black & White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 125.

Racial Reconciliation in U.S. History

As I briefly mentioned, even though there has been a long history of racism in America, it is also quite evident that attempts were made and movements were existent in the past that sought to bring racial harmony and promote unity across races. The history of Christianity in America is not void of initiatives that sought to end racism in the society and promote multiracial congregations within the body of Christ. History speaks of great men and women who have maintained the conviction that God created us as one human race in His image, and some have sought to bring about change in society at the cost of their very lives. Racism is clearly evident throughout American history, but so is the struggle for racial justice. Many have played vital roles in seeking racial justice in America. Sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith state that it was some of the evangelical leaders in the 1960's who "picked up seemingly some of the forgotten pieces of Martin Luther King's vision" and eventually developed a theology of racial reconciliation.² They speak of such leaders as John Perkins, Tom Skinner and Samuel Hines who carried this message of reconciliation which they believed to be the message of Christianity itself.³ This message of reconciliation was centered around well-known scriptures such as Ephesians 2:14-15 which says that Christ "has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." For these evangelical leaders, the emphasis was on showing God's power by reconciling divided people. In

² Emerson and Smith, 52.

³ Ibid, 54.

Reconciliation Blues, Edward Gilbreath points out how John Perkins, for instance, emphasized the “three Rs” – relocation, redistribution and reconciliation.⁴

Relocation meant “incarnational evangelism” ...the lived expression of the great Pauline theme that Jesus Christ did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but took on “the very nature of a servant...” Redistribution meant sharing talents and resources with the poor, but...also working for observable changes in public policy. Reconciliation meant embodying the message that “ye are all one in Christ Jesus” and that Christ has “destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” in lived social experience.⁵

Within this message of reconciliation was repentance and justice which sought to bring racial equality and unity. These evangelical leaders believed that the message of the gospel was not one to be received passively, but required an active faith that sought to bring transformation to a racially divided society. The message of reconciliation was one that exemplified an understanding of biblical Christianity and an articulation of sophisticated theology. It was a message that was a result of a reorientation of evangelical theology in order to make it relevant to the cultural climate. The message of reconciliation has continued throughout the ages being heralded by men and women with an understanding of God’s will for humanity.

Emerson and Smith point out that “Perkins, Skinner, Hines, hardly candidates to be major founding fathers of an evangelical religious movement called reconciliation, yet that is what they became.”⁶ Emerson and Smith perceive these men to be instrumental in heralding the message of reconciliation to a racialized society. However, it is safe to say that there were other men and women before them who undertook the challenging task of

⁴ Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical’s Inside View of White Christianity* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 184.

⁵ Ibid, 185.

⁶ Emerson and Smith, 53.

pursuing racial reconciliation and multiracial congregations in America. As we pay close attention to reconciliation in U.S. History, we will find that there were some black Christian leaders who were discontent with racism and the racialized society of their time, and they made efforts to change the status quo. In the nineteenth century, we learn of a fellowship of the Holiness movement known as the “Evening Light Saints” who were an interracial evangelistic organization.⁷ This group was known for its stance on racial justice and gender equality.⁸ This group so the involvement of one William Seymour, an African American preacher who was one of the leading figures of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century.⁹ William Seymour was at the center of the revival that took place on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California on April 6, 1906.¹⁰ During this revival black and white Christians congregated together in the same building to worship God. The revival that took place during this time spread across race and gender barriers. This coming together of people across races to worship God was not just a result of a supernatural occurrence. Indeed, the unity that came out of the revival can make a good theological argument of God’s initiative to bring together people of all races and cultural backgrounds. However, this interracial gathering of Christians was also something that William Seymour himself worked towards. William Seymour’s theology emphasized, as he put it “the whole gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹¹ In Seymour’s view, the whole gospel of Jesus Christ would lead the church back to the apostolic faith which was

⁷ Douglas M. Strong, *They Walked in the Spirit: Personal Faith and Social Action in America* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 37.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey and Kim, 56.

¹⁰ Ibid, 57.

¹¹ Strong, 39.

central to the early church; and this in turn would restore the love and unity of Christians which was also evident in the life of the early church.¹² We therefore see that racial reconciliation, though in different forms, was present in the history of America.

As I stated briefly in chapter one, the first Great Awakening of the eighteenth century led to a period where black and white Christians worshipped in the same space. The preaching during this time carried with it a strong emphasis on spiritual conversion as well as religious experiences. Black preachers would sometimes preach to both black and white audiences and start multiracial churches.¹³ Many individuals and movements fought to end slavery and other forms of racial injustice. Movements such as the Philadelphia Women's Antislavery Convention held meetings as a racially mixed group.¹⁴ In one instance, an angry mob burnt down their meeting place, but the black and white women met again the next day and issued the following statement:

Resolved, that prejudice against color is the very spirit of slavery, sinful in those who indulge in it, and is the fire which is consuming the happiness and energies of the free people of color.

That it is, therefore, the duty of abolitionists to identify themselves with these oppressed Americans, by sitting with them in places of worship, by appearing with them in our streets...by visiting them at their homes and encouraging them to visit us, receiving them as we do our white fellow citizens.¹⁵

Such an account tells of courageous people in history who have stood the test of time and have stood on what they believed in. These women are an example of the many who stood on their convictions that racism was sinful and that people, especially those

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Okholm, 125.

¹⁴ Ibid, 127.

¹⁵ Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 115.

who claim to be Christians, should seek the unity of people of all races. Among the black preachers, there was always an inherent religious concern towards social justice. A great contributing factor for this has always been the context from which they came. Unlike the white majority, black preachers lived in a world where racism was real to them. They lived in a world where they were constant victims of oppression through racial discrimination, prejudice and segregation. And so there was a desire among many, to speak out against injustice. And for others, as we have observed, their desire was to see racial unity taking place in the church. Unfortunately, the struggle for racial unity never proved to be an easy task as society and culture always seemed to have the winning hand. As we noted through events like the Great Awakening, the Azusa Street revival and others, even though there was a brief period where people of different races appeared to be reconciled by some supernatural invention, or through intentional interracial communities, the ugly face of racial prejudice and segregation has always shown itself in society. During slavery, blacks and whites came together due to the awakening, but even then, segregation continued to take place as slaves and slaveholders sat in separate spaces. During revival camp meetings, a rope would often be used to separate blacks from whites even as they worshipped under the same tent. During the Azusa street revival, whites were not comfortable with blacks being in leadership roles, or blacks being in the same worship space as whites, and eventually denominations split because of race.

History tells us that reconciliation is not a new task, but it has been present throughout the past as men and women have stood on their convictions that the church needs to exist as one body of Christ. History also tells us that racial reconciliation is an

ongoing task that needs to be pursued with conviction and courage. The reason why multiracial meetings and congregations were not successful through history was because a racist mentality still existed in the minds of white people. Racism, this idea that whites are superior to blacks, has been part of the reason why the pursuit of racial equality has been ongoing and difficult. That is why it is important for people to grasp a true biblical Christianity and theology that believes that all human beings are made in the image of God, and that there is only one race – the human race. Racial reconciliation calls for repentance and justice and requires courage and consistency; but it also requires the constructing of creative theologies that will further motivate Christians to practice the building of these multiracial Christian communities.

Moltmann's Eschatology

As we consider our quest for the beloved community as a multiracial community, I am compelled to reflect on and discuss certain theological concepts that have been prevalent over the years. Firstly, I would like to discuss Christian eschatology and its implications on the Christian community. Secondly, I will consider the Perichoretic Trinitarian theology and how it inspires multiracial Christian communities. In my consideration of Christian eschatology, it would only be fitting that German theologian Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope be the central focus of this discussion. Moltmann is compelling because he redefines Christian eschatology, not as a traditional systematic treatment of the last things but as an eschatological reorienting of the whole of theology. In this respect, Moltmann's theology of hope emphasizes a present, active and hopeful participation in God's coming new creation already ahead of time as opposed to a passive waiting for a better world to appear someday in the by and bye. The term "Theology of

Hope” has been chosen by Moltmann to express the starting point for discussion of the Christian faith and of the action required of Christians in the world today. Moltmann sums up his theology of hope theory in these words:

In the medium of hope our theological concepts become not judgments which nail down reality to what it is, but anticipations which show reality its prospects and its future possibilities. Theological concepts do not give a fixed form to reality, but they are expanded by hope and anticipate future being... They illuminate reality by displaying its future.¹⁶

Moltmann’s interpretation of Eschatology as the doctrine of hope and of the future¹⁷ has implications on the way we perceive reality in the present. In his book, *Religion, Revolution, and the future*, he sets the premise for a vision or perception of the future that transforms the present, and he uses the word *Neuzeit* to describe a “new age” or “new world”, so to speak.¹⁸ And this *Neuzeit*, is a sort of expression of freedom, but not a freedom that is spatial but one that is in time.¹⁹ This newness does not have to do with a change in geographical location, but is one that can be experienced socially, politically as well as inwardly. Moltmann’s eschatological concept of future hope opens up a wide range of possibilities for the present reality. It suggests the potential for a transformation or revolution of the present reality. This eschatological perspective therefore is “oriented to a new future and hence wants to change the world rather than explain it, to transform existence rather than elucidate it.”²⁰ This eschatological concept

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), 35-36.

¹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution, and the Future* (New York: Charles Scribner’s sons, 1969), 202.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, xii.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

suggests of a *novum* – a new thing – in the present reality.²¹ The book of Isaiah records these words: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!”²² Moltmann suggest that this new reality comes to us through the transformation of time on a transcendental level.²³ The eschatological category for this transformation of the present reality is conversion, the change of time and not merely a disruption of time.²⁴ Theological concepts, according to Moltmann, become anticipations which show reality its prospects and its future possibilities. This has implications on the way we view the present and act in the present.

Eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.²⁵

Christian eschatology should have implications on the present because the future that is hoped for should not merely be a utopian existence in the far future, but it should be embodied in the present and transform Christian communities that are anticipating that future. The future that is hoped for by Christians has not been hidden from them by God, but it has been made known to them through revelation in order to inspire an active hope. Central to eschatology is the promise of the kingdom of God and the lordship of God manifested in his kingdom. This promise further aligns with the expectation not only of

²¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 22. For Moltmann, this *novum* is a new creation that does not emerge out of the old, but it is one that is exclusively apart from the old.

²² Isaiah 43:18.

²³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 26.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 22.

²⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.

the lordship of God, but of salvation, peace, happiness and life.²⁶ Eschatology is therefore built on this divine promise that does not see the future developing within the framework of possibilities inherent in the present, but this divine promise is dependent on the God of the promise to bring about its fulfillment.²⁷ The word promise itself means that it is not dependent on the present reality but is actually in contradiction to it, and it finds its resting place or identification in the future reality. And as I have already mentioned, this future reality is the Kingdom of God in which all nations and things come together under His lordship and reign.

A second part to the theology of hope is the fact of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moltmann states that when considering the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we need to take into account both the past and the future. The viability of comprehending both the crucifixion of Jesus is dependent on taking into consideration both the historical and eschatological verifications.²⁸ This approach was different from the existential theologians who emphasized the “here and now”. However, in Moltmann’s case, the God of the Old Testament is seen to be a God of promise whose promise does not tie a person to the present but to the future. God is God of the nomadic tribe always going before His people as he leads them into the future.²⁹ This future, therefore, is the “reality in which the promise finds its counterpart, its answer and its

²⁶ Ibid, 216.

²⁷ Ibid, 103.

²⁸ Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*, 50-51.

²⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 216.

fulfillment, in which it discovers or creates a reality which accords with it and in which it comes to rest.”³⁰

This understanding of eschatology presents us with a framework of understanding and pursuing this beloved community. The expectation of the kingdom of God which the Christian hope brings is rooted in the divine promise. This hope is directed towards the lordship of Yahweh in the coming kingdom. “Bound up with the expectation of the lordship of God is the expectation that his people, mankind, and all that he has made will attain to salvation, peace, happiness, life, to what it was truly meant to be.”³¹ God’s people and all that he has made fit into this eschatological vision of salvation; a vision which is unrestricted and which break through all spatial and racial limitations. And it is this reality that all ethnicities and cultures should pursue and act upon. It is this eschatological future reality, so to speak, that creates a tension with the present reality in which we live in today. A reality with its human social construction of race. Even so, this future reality gives the Christian community today hope; a hope that is rooted in the promise. The divine promise arises from the present reality to the reality made possible to the God of the promise. And because of the contradiction that the promise brings between the present and the future reality, there can either arise doubt that is subject to the given present reality, or faith that measures the present reality with the word of promise. The future reality is attainable simply because of the God of the promise who empowers those who act in accordance with his will.

³⁰ Ibid, 104.

³¹ Ibid, 216.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the beloved community, he spoke of the possibility that was present to people who desired to make a difference and bring change to society. When he spoke of the beloved community, he spoke in a faith that was founded on the divine promise and rooted in the God of the promise. Martin Luther King Jr rarely used the term “Kingdom of God”, but it is quite clear that when he spoke of the beloved community he indirectly spoke of the kingdom of God. This kingdom of God is simply life as it was intended to be. The human flourishing of this life consists of people from all nations and tribes living together in harmony under the lordship and reign of God. And this future reality should have an effect on the way we perceive and conduct ourselves in the present. Moltmann’s understanding of the resurrection of Christ helps us to understand this concept of hope. The resurrection of Jesus, according to Moltmann, is not dependent on historical events for its verification, but it is dependent on the future; it is dependent on eschatological verification. The resurrection of Jesus creates meaning and has implications on Christian life today. “The prolepsis or anticipation of the future that was seen in his resurrection was embodied in his existence for others and in the vicarious meditation of freedom, justice and salvation.”³² Pursuing the beloved community, a multiracial community where justice and equality reign, is therefore seeking to embody the future reality in the present.

Perichoresis Trinitarian Theology

As we continue to consider the beloved community in our discussion on a multiracial Christian community, one concept which is vital to our understanding of community is that of Perichoresis. In “Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New

³² Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, 53.

Trinitarian Theology”, Moltmann discusses the concept of Perichoresis, a community without uniformity, and personality without individualism.³³ It is a mutual indwelling of the equal divine persons: Father, Son and Spirit.³⁴ Moltmann states how in Perichoresis there is mutuality without mixing or separating, and that in this mutual indwelling, the Father, Son and Spirit exist as one. In the Trinity all three persons of the Godhead do not exist outside of the others but they all find their existence in the other persons, and therefore redefining personhood to an ecstatic hypostasis.³⁵ Each person of the trinity remains distinct and yet inseparable from the other persons.

By virtue of their Perichoresis the divine persons exist so intimately with one another, for one another, and in one another that they constitute a single, unique, and complete unity by themselves. This is the Trinitarian concept of the unity of the triune God, because it combines Threeness and oneness without reducing the three to one or the one to three, and avoids the dangers of modalism as well as tritheism.³⁶

The unity that exists among the three persons of the trinity is one that is so intimate and interdependent that the persons are inseparable, and yet they all remain distinct and true to their individual personhood. Moltmann’s Perichoresis is a powerful illustration of an integrating community. The Father, Son and Spirit are unseparated and yet unmixed in this divine community of love.

Perichoretic Trinitarian theology offers a powerful imagination for constructing a theological basis for racial reconciliation and multiracial communities. The call for racial

³³ Jürgen Moltmann. “Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology,” in *Trinity, Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 113.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 114.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 115.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 117.

unity in the body of Christ is not a call to assimilation or domination of one group by another. There is high disregard for ethnocentrism as each ethnic group is valued and honored and finds its existence in the other. In this community there is no room for the myth of “colorblindness” which says that a person’s skin color should be ignored or overlooked in order to have genuine unity in community. Rather, each ethnic and cultural heritage is upheld in an environment of mutuality and interdependence. God created a diverse world and it is only when this diversity is embraced that humanity flourishes. Christians are one in Christ, but this oneness does not mean ignoring our differences, but it means we uphold them. After all, human interactions also expose individual uniqueness. Human beings are created different, and yet we are meant to flourish together in community. There is an intimacy that exists in such a community that, as Willie James Jennings states, can help us “witness a God who surprises us by love of difference and draws us to new capacities to imagine humanity’s reconciliation.”³⁷

King’s Concept of the Beloved Community

This subject of reconciliation is one that cannot be discussed without considering Martin Luther King, Jr.’s philosophy of integration expressed through his vision of the Beloved Community. As I stated briefly in the introduction in chapter one, King’s notion of the “Beloved Community” owes the origin of its name to the American philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce. Royce spoke of the Beloved Community as an embodiment of what he terms “loyalty.” “By loyalty I mean the practically devoted love of an individual

³⁷ Jennings, 9.

for a community.”³⁸ The concept of loyalty is one that, when coupled with grace, is identified as the Beloved Community. The love that exists within the community expresses its authenticity by being inclusive and extending to those outside the community. According to Royce, it is the duty of this love to use all means that tend to make the neighbor himself one of the lovers.³⁹ “Only in this way can the love for the community be truly shown; by doing all that is appropriate within the scope of Christian love to make that love maximally inclusive so that all might partake in the love of and by that community.”⁴⁰

There are several suggestions as to how Martin Luther King, Jr. came into contact with Royce’s concept of the Beloved Community. It is most probable that King came across Royce during his academic career. Based on Ansbro’s analysis of Martin Luther King Jr, we take note that it is possible that King might have come across Royce’s philosophy when he was pursuing his PhD under the mentorship of L. Harold DeWolf.⁴¹ Herstein says that King might have also heard the idea discussed both in seminary at Crozer and Boston University. Herstein also states that King might have heard the idea reinforced and interpreted in the context of the black church by Howard Thurman.⁴² However, irrespective of how King might have come across the concept, we see how the

³⁸ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 41.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 90.

⁴⁰ Gary Herstein, “The Roycean Roots of the Beloved Community” in *The Pluralist* Vol. 4, Number 2 (University of Illinois, 2009), 98.

⁴¹ John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 18.

⁴² Herstein, 92.

notion of the Beloved Community was embraced by King and appeared in both his writings and speeches.⁴³ King stated his concept of agape love and its contrast with other kinds of love many times. For instance:

Agape is more than romantic love, agape is more than friendship. Agape is understanding, creative, redemptive, good will to all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart. So that when one rises to love on this level, he loves men not because he likes them, not because their ways appeal to him, but he loves every man because God loves him.⁴⁴

King was indebted to L. Harold DeWolf and Swedish theologian Anders Nygren for his conception of agape, and although he had disagreements with some of Nygren's doctrine, he identified with certain elements of Nygren's description of agape as self-sacrifice.⁴⁵ My emphasis on King's concept of agape is firstly for us to observe the correlation between King and Royce's use of the Beloved Community. King was compelled, among other things, by Royce's notion of the Beloved Community because of Royce's emphasis on loyalty – love and devotion – as that which is central to his philosophy of community. Secondly and as I stated above, agape love was to be central to the notion of the Beloved Community. The non-violent resistant ethos within the Civil Rights movement was driven and motivated by the power of love, and the anticipated outcome of non-violence was to be reconciliation and the creation of the beloved

⁴³ Ibid, 93.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), 46.

⁴⁵ Ansbro, 10.

community.⁴⁶ “King explained that members of the beloved community would allow the spirit of agape to direct all their individual and social relationships.”⁴⁷

The social and systemic power dynamic during the period of King’s life were plagued with racism. Discrimination existed in education, employment, housing and public accommodations. The context surrounding the Civil Rights movement was such that economic discrimination was deeply rooted in American society, millions were housed in slums clearly making evident the depressed living standards for negroes. The existence of racial inequality continued to be prevalent. Discrimination and segregation continued to widen the gap between white Americans and black Americans. As King said himself, in his book *Where Do We Go from Here?*

These brief facts disclose the magnitude of the gap between existing realities and the goal of equality. There is not even a common language when the term “equality” is used. Negroes and whites have fundamentally different definitions.⁴⁸

The historic achievements of the Civil Rights movement were such that they had overcome milestones in American history such as the signing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.⁴⁹ They had endured the hard times in the struggle for desegregation and equal opportunities. And yet it is important to note that the Civil Rights movement and Martin Luther King Jr. did not simply struggle to end segregation and discrimination. The goal of their struggle was to unite without assimilation with white America as brothers and sister. And this is where King’s vision of the Beloved Community fits into the narrative

⁴⁶ King, 12.

⁴⁷ Ansbro, 187.

⁴⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

of the Civil Rights history. As King himself rightly points out, the end result of nonviolence and the struggle for freedom was not simply desegregation and an end to racial discrimination. The goal was reconciliation and the creation of the beloved community. The goal was integration and the establishment of brotherhood. This is an important point in the development of my thesis as it upholds the necessity of racial reconciliation in contemporary American society. The driving force behind Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle for justice and equality was the believe in brotherhood and unity, and this is seen throughout King's life. King was not merely content with ending segregation and racial segregation, but he felt the urge to pursue unity and brotherhood motivated by love – agape love. He emphasizes this in his book *Where Do We Go from Here?* “The absence of brutality and unregenerate evil is not the presence of justice. To stay murder is not the same thing as to ordain brotherhood.”⁵⁰ And this pursuit of brotherhood was the basis of his vision of the beloved community. This is what drew the line between King, and the militant figures such as Malcom X and Stokely Carmichael. The nation of Islam and the Black Power movement sought to defeat the opponent (white America) through violence and force. Carmichael and the Black Power movement sought to separate themselves completely from white Americans and they contended the inclusion of whites in freedom marches and other protests.⁵¹ Malcom X, Carmichael and others sought only full participation of blacks without any involvement from whites. Their purpose was to defeat the opponents, but King made it clear that, “the nonviolent resister does not seek to

⁵⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁵¹ Ibid, 27.

humiliate or defeat the opponent but win his friendship and understanding.”⁵² This kind of desire can only be accomplished by love as the driving force and integral part of the movement, which sought to create this beloved community.

King’s ultimate goal was integration which would be witnessed in the beloved community. He would emphasize that desegregation was not enough, and that true freedom is evident when there is integration.

Desegregation then is not enough for it only travels a part of the distance. It vouchsafes the lack of restriction against one’s freedom but it does not prohibit the blocking of his total capacity. Only integration can do this, for it unchains the spirit and mind and provides for the highest degree of life-quality freedom. I may do well in a desegregated society but I can never know what my total capacity is until I live in an integrated society. I cannot be free until I have had the opportunity to fulfill my total capacity untrammelled by any artificial hindrance or barrier. Integration demands that we recognize that a denial of freedom is a denial of life itself.⁵³

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s beloved community is a vision that is still relevant to contemporary culture in the American society. There indeed has been some progress in the struggle for racial equality in the last four to five decades in America, but there is still some distance to travel in this journey towards racial reconciliation in the evangelical church, the one place where the beloved community is expected to exist. The Civil Rights movement had its roots in the black church, but it extended its sphere of influence far beyond the religious institution. It was a movement that effected change in the American society as a whole; and it is clearly evident that the philosophies encompassing the movement had biblical basis. The beloved community has biblical basis and although there is no clear reference of it in the bible, its principals and beliefs confirm its biblical

⁵² King, *Testament of Hope*, 12.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 121.

theological grounding. In today's world, there is a sense of freedom; discrimination and segregation are not explicitly apparent in the society. And yet, as we observe the church today, we still see traces of willful segregation. People are willfully choosing to worship and fellowship with people of the same ethnicity and culture. The racial divisions in church that are a result of America's racist history are still in sight proving that America has still got a long way to go in terms of bringing about the beloved community.

Churches today are discussing the need for racial reconciliation, seminaries and Christian universities are holding workshops and conferences on racial reconciliation, but there is still a long way to go. Some institutions and churches have the appearance of racial reconciliation, but the diversity and inclusion remains to be truly authentic. Racial reconciliation is not a white church with three or four black families, or one black staff member. Racial reconciliation and the existence of the beloved community is not simply about including a few minority people to an already existing program or structure. I believe that true racial reconciliation and a multiracial Christian community will be the reorientation of the entire organizational structure where power is shared, mutuality exists and there is a presence of true brotherhood. "King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. Peace with justice will prevail over conflict."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ "King's Philosophy", The King Center – Since 1968, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy#sub4> (accessed on February 1, 2016).

Conclusion

The movement towards racial reconciliation in America has been an ongoing process throughout history. Many Christian leaders and theologians have contributed to the struggle for racial reconciliation. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw leaders such as William J. Seymour who sought to bring racial equality through the charismatic movement. The Azusa Street revival of 1906 through 1909 caused many to witness a remarkable event in American religious history when black and white Christians came together to worship and witness the presence of the Spirit.

The twenty first century brought us Evangelical leaders such as Tom Skinner and John Perkins who both had remarkable religious experiences that changed their life and set them on the path of evangelism. However, as they continued in ministry over the years, their messages included a call for social justice. Their messages did not end with personal conversion but also sent out a plea for societal transformation. The struggle for racial equality is one that many prominent black leaders seem to inherit. The challenge and task of theologizing remains today in an attempt to address the contemporary social changes and to make the Christian message relevant to the cultural needs in America.

Leaders and theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Martin Luther King, Jr. have provided us with resources and legacies that we can learn from in the fight to address racial injustice. King had a vision for reconciliation through the creation of the Beloved Community which sought to bring a new reality to this broken world of injustice and discrimination. And as we have noted in this chapter, Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* as well as his perichoretic Trinitarian theology can be useful in construction a theology perichoretic missional church. As we will observe in Chapter Four, this mutual

indwelling and movement within the trinity possess a challenge for a Christian community that is inclusive, inviting as well as diverse.

CHAPTER FOUR
MULTIRACIAL MISSIONAL CHURCHES AS AN IMPERATIVE FOR RACIAL
RECONCILIATION

Introduction

The church needs to be involved in neighborhoods, communities and the society at large in order to maintain its effective witness. The church sets its own standards very high when it proclaims itself to be God's chosen people and the bearer of His name. The church speaks of love, unity, forgiveness and justice, and calls the world to become part of its community. However, many are faced with a dilemma when they cannot seem to reconcile the church's proclamation with its deeds. As a community that claims to be a visible manifestation of God's presence in the world, there are high expectations that are placed on the church. The church is expected to be a community that engages the culture and makes an impact in society. Many Protestant congregations, however, struggle to discern or have an understanding of their missionary activity. Congregations need a refreshing perspective to discern the times and to discern their calling and to act on it.¹

I find Bevans' insights on the praxis model of Contextual theology is applicable to the church as the church itself needs to reflect and discern its Christian identity within a culture, from the point of view of social change.²

¹ Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2002), 11.

² Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith & Cultures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 192.

“The praxis model understands revelation as God’s ongoing action in history, manifested in situations and events. Theology, therefore, consists in discerning, through analysis, where God is acting, and then attempting through reflective action, to act in that same situation as God’s partner.”³

The church, therefore, needs to be relevant to the needs of the culture. In my thesis, I have addressed race relations in the American society and the prevalence of racial divisions in the evangelical church. In Chapter One, I stated how the race problem in American society and history has shaped and had a profound impact on the evangelical church. The church, unfortunately, has failed to escape the negative impact of a racialized society. Other evangelicals have failed to see this race problem as a structural problem because of a perspective that is influenced by individualism due to evangelical theology and Christianity. The existence of black churches and white churches as separate entities traces its roots back to slavery and racial oppression in American history. And so, racial division is a problem that is evident in both the American evangelical church and the American society as a whole. This, therefore, is a unique problem because it presents us with a need in the church as well as the American culture. The church’s witness in America has been marred from within and without. The church needs to regain its effective witness by reflecting on its own nature, and by seeking ways to address the need in the larger American society. In Chapter Two, I set the premise for a biblical basis for multiethnic churches making an argument for the believers’ oneness in Christ. In Chapter Three I argued how an eschatology and a perichoretic Trinitarian theology informs King’s Beloved Community, a multiracial community. In this chapter, therefore, I will argue that the nature of the church is to be both multiracial and missional, and that this incorporation can necessitate racial reconciliation in the American culture. Then end

³ Ibid.

result of this multiracial missional church movement brings us a step closer to the existence of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Beloved Community. I will discuss in this chapter, 1) the establishment of the institutional church, 2) the “private sector” of the church, 3) the nature of the Missional church, and 4) Multiracial missional churches.

The Establishment of the Institutional Church

The New Testament refers to the church as the “*ekklesia*”, which is a term that arises from a verb *kaleo* (“to call”) as well as the proposition *ek* (“out of”).⁴ This has led to the conclusion that the church is “the called out ones”, to mean that it is made up of people who have been converted to Christianity and have therefore been “called out” from among others in the world. “The Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (the Septuagint) chose *ekklesia* to render the Hebrew word *qahal* (“assembly”), which the historical writers used to refer to Israel as the “congregation” or “assembly of the Lord.”⁵ There has therefore been an understanding in the past that the church creates its own Christian subculture community made up of believers who now belong to Jesus Christ. The book of Acts has numerous records of historical events that took place in the lives of many that eventually led to the coming together of the disciples of Jesus to form a community of believers. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”⁶ These new believers came together and “devoted themselves to the apostles’

⁴ Grenz, 605.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Acts 2:46.

teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”⁷ Worship, the Sacraments and the Word were features that characterized the early church long before it became an established institution. The established church eventually came into existence in the 4th Century when Christianity was formalized during the period of the Roman Empire.⁸ This led to Christendom which also brought about a misplaced allegiance between God and church polity. Darrell Guder notes,

Neither the structures nor the theology of our established Western traditional churches is missional. They are shaped by the legacy of Christendom. That is, they have been formed by centuries in which Western civilization considered itself formally and officially Christian.... Even when the legal structures of Christendom have been removed (as in North America), the legacy continues as a pattern of powerful traditions, attitudes, and social structures....⁹

Guder points out that the church evolved and eventually became structured and institutionalized as a result of Christendom in such a way that it was difficult to see the existence of the church as missional. And as much as institutions are necessary to provide structure and order, when polity becomes the central focus, the missional focus is lost and God’s activity in the world is not easily discernable. In his book, *Ministry in the New Testament*, David Bartlett further emphasizes “the danger of this rationalized institutional structure”¹⁰ when he states:

More than the facing of eschatological hope or the recurrent threat of heresy, the movement toward rationalized institutional structures in a complex world causes

⁷ Acts 2:42.

⁸ Craig Van Gelder, *The Missional Church & Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 18.

⁹ Darrell L. Guder, “Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent,” in Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 5-6.

¹⁰ David G. Forney, “Living in the City – Journeying outside the Gate: A Missional Approach to Polity,” in Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Missional Church & Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 66.

the church legitimately to call some people to provide leadership in teaching, administering, enabling care, and preaching.... The danger is that those of us who are paid for churchly jobs will so lose touch with other Christians that we will think ecclesiastical issues are the main issues and the bright new paraments a sign of redemption for the pain of the world.¹¹

Bartlett points out that many times the focus shifts from having a missional mindset to prioritizing “ecclesiastical issues”, and although efforts to keep the church operational are important, the church should not lose sight of its missional nature. The central and primary focus of the church needs to remain on participation in God’s mission and the discerning of His activity in the world.

The “Private Sector” of the church

Leslie Newbigin is considered by many as the father of the missional church movement. In his book, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Newbigin outlines the gospel message in the context of Western culture. Newbigin explains the effects that modernity/Enlightenment has had on Western culture and he believes that when often talking about the contextualization of the gospel message, the Western culture itself is often overlooked and the focus is often placed on other countries in places like Asia, Africa and the Middle East. One very important point that Newbigin makes as he analyzes the nature of the Western culture is the emphasis on the separation of fact and value in the west.¹² He states that this separation of fact and value has led to a division between the public world, comprised of facts, and the private world which is based on personal values. Newbigin further states that,

¹¹ David Bartlett, *Ministry in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 188.

¹² Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel in Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 18.

This separation of value from fact is reflected in the separation of private from public life that is one of the characteristics of our culture. And, as I shall argue, the response of the Christian churches – or at least of the Protestant churches – to the challenge of the Enlightenment was to accept the dichotomy and withdraw into the private sector.¹³

As Newbigin begins to explore and explain Western culture, one obvious aspect that he comes across is that scientific discovery and the progress that it has made in the Western world. He also mentions the age of the thinkers of the Enlightenment as the “age of reason” and what effect that had on Western cultural development. Science coupled with rationalism, as a means to the attainment of knowledge, all worked to advance the Western world and produce a world of facts based on science and rationality. As a result, anything that could not be proved scientifically or rationally was relegated to the private sector in society. If the validity of Christianity or the existence of God cannot be proven scientifically then it is no longer considered facts but personal opinion or beliefs. And as such, one’s personal beliefs cannot be imposed on the public because they are individualized. Because of this separation of fact and value, Christianity now appears as one religion among many, based on the pluralistic nature created by the private world of personal values and beliefs. Western culture is ever-changing and there continues to be challenges facing this modern world. Newbigin emphasizes the need for Christians to be a visible presence in the world and not just to revert to a private world created by the Enlightenment/modernity. The church can be provision for individuals, a place in the private sector where they can enjoy an inward religious security but are not required to challenge the ideology that rules the public life of nations. It is for this very reason that the mandate of the church is to have a gospel that is embodied and made relevant in every

¹³ Ibid, 19.

culture. And because of this, there is a call placed on the church by the western culture, a call to respond to the current injustices and race problems prevalent in American society. The church itself believes that its beliefs are not simply personal values but they are facts and should therefore be considered as facts in the world. The call on the church, in Matthew 28 verse 19 and Acts 1 verse 8, was a call to come out of the private sector and go in to the public world as witnesses to the Kingdom of God. The church is therefore to exist as a missional church.

The Nature of the Church as Missional

A good starting point in this missional conversation is by looking at another book by Leslie Newbigin entitled *The Open Secret*, where he gives an introduction to the theology of mission. This book is important because it provides a brief historical progression of the missional conversation, but it also begins by observing the triune God as one who is on mission. It is safe to say that the nature of God Himself is missional. Throughout most of the biblical narrative we see this overarching theme of being “sent” by God to accomplish his purposes in the world. The life and ministry of Jesus Christ Himself is about the son who was sent by the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go and proclaim the Kingdom of God to the nations. Newbigin addresses three primary aspects of this, namely, proclaiming the Kingdom of the Father, sharing the Life of the Son, and Bearing the Witness of the Spirit, all of which are part of the Triune God’s active mission in the world. “Mission is concerned with nothing less than the completion of all that God has begun to do in the creation of the world and of humankind.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 56.

Viewing the nature of God as missional helps the church to understand that it is in fact God's mission and the task of the church is simply to discern where God is working in the world and to simply come alongside Him to partner with Him in the work that He is doing. As Newbigin states, if God is the true missionary then our business is not to promote what the church is doing in the community or neighborhoods, but to find out what God is doing in the world and to join forces with him.¹⁵

The Spirit of God is there to guide us and enable us to fulfill God's purpose as He bears witness to God's mission in the world. A careful study of the book of Acts will help us acknowledge the fact that the Spirit is actively at work in the lives of the Apostles as He guides and directs them God's mission. In Acts chapter 2, we notice that that curse of Babel from Genesis chapter 11 is being removed and the Spirit's presence is manifested among the disciples and people from every nation are able to hear in their own tongue the mighty works of God. We notice here that God's mission is becoming apparent as it is no longer the Jewish community that hears the mighty works of God, but people from other nations as well. In Acts 8 we notice that persecution breaks out in Jerusalem and the disciples are scattered throughout the neighboring regions, and they ultimately share the good news of the Kingdom of God with those they come into contact with. In Acts 10 we see how God appears to the Apostle Peter in a vision and begins to speak to him, and eventually he is led by the Spirit to the household of Cornelius, a gentile Roman Centurion. As Peter begins to preach to Cornelius and his household, the Spirit of God is manifested and Cornelius and his household begin to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. This narrative in the book of Acts presents us with a God who is on

¹⁵ Ibid, 18.

mission through the witness of the Spirit. The disciples in the early church are led by the Spirit to go beyond cultural and ethnic barriers in their witness to the Kingdom of God. “The reign of God that the church proclaims is indeed present in the life of the church, but it is not the church’s possession. It goes before us, summoning us to follow.”¹⁶ God has been at work from the beginning, and he continues to be at work as a missional God. In *The Open Secret*, Newbigin helps us to see that the church first and foremost has a God who is on mission in the world, and the church simply partakes in that mission. And this mission calls for the church to come out of its private sector in the world and to make an impact in society. For the early church in the book of Acts, they had to come out of their own secured environment in the Jewish community, and they had to go and become witnesses of the Kingdom of God to gentiles and other nations in the surrounding regions both near and far. The Apostle Paul is seen as a herald and pioneer of this missionary movement as he travels from place to place establishing churches and preaching the gospel. As I stated in Chapter two, Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians is a call for both Jews and Gentiles to come together as one in Christ. As the church continues to grow, cultural conflicts arose in the church due to multiculturalism, and Paul addresses these conflicts in Galatians and Ephesians calling for oneness in the body of Christ. The mission of God which began in Jerusalem had now extended to other parts of the world and was calling for people of different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities to come together and worship God as one. The mission is God’s and he has called the church to partake in this mission. The nature of the church is therefore to be missional.

¹⁶ Ibid, 64.

As we consider the missional church, it is important that I clarify the difference between “mission” and “missions”. In my thesis, I emphasize the former which, as David J. Bosch puts it refers to the *missio Dei* (God’s mission) as opposed to the latter which refers to the missionary ventures of the church.¹⁷ Mission has to do with God’s activity and involvement in the world, and focuses on God’s purpose for the world. Missions refers to particular forms, related to specific times and needs. That is why in some churches, you will hear of short-term or long-term missions trip. This primarily involves a group of people from a specific church going overseas or to some other location where there is a specific need in order to serve and minister to the people in the location. Mission, however, cannot be confined to one specific time or location but characterizes the very existence of the church as whole. In Mission or *missio Dei* (mission of God) God is already understood to be at work in the world and the church is responsible for discovering what God is doing and then seeking to participate in His activity.¹⁸ Put summarily:

In attempting to flesh out the *missio Dei* concept, the following could be said: in the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.¹⁹

The missional church concept, therefore, has an understanding that God is a missionary God, or missional God, as I put it. His very nature is missionary in that he

¹⁷ Bosch, 10.

¹⁸ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 31.

¹⁹ Bosch, 390.

sends his Son and his Spirit into the world for the salvation of humanity. As Bosch puts it, “God is a fountain of sending love”, and the church simply participates in this “movement of God’s love toward people”. The institutional church and the protestant church, which Newbigin says is relegated to the private sector of the world, is the one that simply limits the mission of God to missions’ activities in the church. When the church simply has evangelism events one day out of the month, or goes out to serve and feed the homeless one weekend every three to four months, it is not being a missional church but it is simply having missions’ activities in the church. “The missional understanding of the church shifts the church’s identity from an institution that organizes for mere surviving to one that participates in God’s redemptive mission in the world.”²⁰ As stated above, Bosch argues that mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God because God is a missionary God. And it is on this premise that I know argue for multiracial missional churches.

Bosch puts mission in the context of the doctrine of the trinity in that *missio Dei* is perceived as the work of the father in sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit.²¹ This exemplifies the Trinitarian movement in the mission of God. Newbigin, likewise, speaks of mission as proclaiming the Kingdom of the Father, sharing the life of the Son and bearing the witness of the Spirit.²² However, a consideration of perichoretic Trinitarian theology makes some valuable contributions to the multiracial missional church.

²⁰ James Tzu-Kao Chai, “A Contextual Missiology for the Southern Baptist Church in Taiwan: Reviewing the Past and Envisioning the Future,” in Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 237.

²¹ Bosch, 390.

²² Open Secret, 56.

Firstly, a perichoretic Trinitarian theology makes a case for the plausibility of a multiracial community because of the emphasis on distinct yet unified persons of the trinity. Alister E. McGrath also refers to this as “mutual interpenetration” – the manner in which the three persons of the trinity refer to one another.²³ This divine perichoretic community allows for both independence and interdependence as there is evidenced a community without uniformity, personality without individualism. This has very important implications for a multiracial community as it encourages integration without assimilation. As black and white Christians and all other ethnic groups come together in fellowship, each culture and ethnicity brings its own distinctiveness and uniqueness and shares life and with one another. In *The Missional Church in Context* Gary M. Simpson makes use of perichoretic Trinitarian theology to emphasize *communio* relationality and *communio* ecclesiology, derived from this mutual interpenetration and indwelling aspect of Perichoresis. This relationality involves encircling, embracing and this going from one to another.²⁴ We see this evident in Acts 4 verse 32 where the believers are all in one place and share everything they had. Simpson uses this to illustrate a perichoretic missional church. I would add that this *communio* relationality extends across races and ethnicities as it affords people of cultural and ethnic differences the opportunity of sharing in the Trinitarian experience of God. There is profound intimacy that is assumed in the trinity as the “divine person embrace one another in love and exist in one

²³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 298.

²⁴ Gary Simpson, “A Reformation Is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A Promising Theology for an Emerging Missional Church” in Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Missional Church in Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2007), 82.

another.”²⁵ Simpson also speaks of “perichoretic power” in *communio* ecclesiology which suggests a social transformation of ecclesial leadership which evidently suggests a sharing of power as opposed to a hierarchical management model of ecclesial leadership.²⁶ This is a very important point for my argument for a multiracial missional church because diversity in a multiracial church is not simply an increase in number of minority groups, or equally a shared number of various ethnic groups; however, a multiracial missional congregation will evidently mean a share in leadership between black and white Christians. However, I would be skeptical of the variations of power and what that shared leadership would look like when considering the relationship of the missional church to the neighborhood or context. As a chosen people, the missional church does exist to offer guidance and direction to the community in order for the church to maintain effective missionality. Therefore, I would state that as much as authentic and meaningful relationships should develop between the missional church and its surrounding context, this should not result in the church’s conformity to the principles and standards of this world which may not even acknowledge the existence of God.

Secondly, a perichoretic Trinitarian theology makes an important case for a multiracial missional church because of the inviting and inclusive aspect of the perichoretic unity of the triune God.²⁷ “The perichoretic unity of the divine persons is so wide open that the whole world can find room and rest and eternal life within it.”²⁸ This is a very important point as the missional church suggests a proclamation and call

²⁵ Moltmann, *Perichoresis*, 114.

²⁶ Simpson, *The Missional Church in Context*, 83.

²⁷ Moltmann, *Perichoresis*, 117.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

extended to a broken world to join and partake in the Trinitarian experience of God. The divine trinity is open graciously and extends an invitation out of love for all humanity to partake in the eternal life of the triune God. The missional community is a community that, likewise, invites and includes all that may. The triune God accepts sinners and liberates the imprisoned and the oppressed.

Finally, the perichoretic Trinitarian community makes an important case for a multiracial church because it makes possible for racial integration in the church through an intimate community. Miroslav Volf refers to Perichoresis as “the reciprocal interiority of the Trinitarian persons.”²⁹ This, as I have already stated, suggests that the three persons of the trinity mutually permeate one another while at the same time maintaining their distinctiveness.³⁰ A multiracial Christian community is one, therefore, that participates in this Trinitarian experience as both black and white Christians respond to the call of Christian unity and are intentional in making such a perichoretic community a reality. As black and white Christians come to the realization that they all share one common faith in Christ, and seek to join together, intimate relationships are a possibility. Multiracial relationships will then begin to permeate one another as life is being shared and poured into one another and as individuals find their place in one another’s hearts. As such multiracial relationships exist, the essence of the community is realized and true reconciliation then exists.

As I have already established, this missional community is one that invites, includes and embraces all of God’s beloved creation. And just as the triune God

²⁹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 209.

³⁰ Ibid.

throughout history has been engaged in the work of the mission, so too the missional church is to imitate this attribute of God. Moltmann discusses this future hope as that of a new reality which I would add is a perichoretic community of future coming of the kingdom of God. The missional church is therefore sent not only to proclaim this new eschatological perichoretic reality of the Kingdom of God, but it is also to be a sign and a witness of what is to come. This therefore provides a mandate for racial reconciliation in this broken world. Moltmann further states that one aspect of the Trinitarian experience is liberation by grace where God draws and liberates the guilty and the victims, the oppressor and the oppressed.³¹

Multiracial Missional Churches

In our discussion on the missional church movement, it is important that we take into consideration the importance of multiracial/multiethnic congregations. As I stated briefly, the missional church takes into account a missionary God who sends his Son and his Spirit for the salvation and redemption of the world. David Bosch states, “God is a fountain of sending love.”³² The missional church conversation takes into serious consideration the fact that God is active in the world and that his Spirit is already at work throughout history. Darrel L. Guder states that “Mission is a result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation.”³³ In the book, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, Van Gelder and Zscheile state that mission is God’s initiative and

³¹ Ibid, 119.

³² Bosch, 390.

³³ Guder, 4.

activity through the Spirit in the church in relation to the world.³⁴ It is therefore clearly evident that most scholars emphasize that God is already at work in the world through his Spirit, and it is the task of the church to discern this work and to join God in his mission. An incorporation of the multiracial/multiethnic conversation into the missional church conversation is necessary firstly because according to historical accounts it is part of God's mission, and secondly the *missio Dei* has a uniting factor for Christians and congregations.

In *The Open Secret*, missiologist Leslie Newbigin discusses the mission of the Triune God as Proclaiming the Kingdom of the Father, Sharing the Life of the Son and Bearing the Witness of the Spirit. As he addresses the Witness of the Spirit, Newbigin points out how through the work of the Spirit we can observe God's missional agenda. He emphasizes that mission is not just something that the church does, but it is the work of the Spirit who goes before the church in its missionary journey.³⁵ The Spirit's work is traced in the book of Acts as he begins to empower the disciples in proclaiming the good news of Jesus. But, in the book of Acts and in the establishment of the early church the Spirit also seems to be at work in breaking cultural and ethnic barriers as the Jews are compelled by the Spirit to make contact with the Gentiles in their witnessing of the Kingdom of God. We notice this in Acts 2, Acts 8, Acts 10, and in Paul's Epistles to the Galatians and the Ephesians.³⁶ "The story of the meeting of Peter and Cornelius is especially significant in the light that it throws on the sovereign work of the Spirit in

³⁴ Van Gelder and Zscheile, 30.

³⁵ Newbigin, 56.

³⁶ Ibid, 58-59.

mission.³⁷ This story is found in Acts 10 where Peter is compelled by the Spirit to go and meet a pagan army officer named Cornelius in order to share the good news of Jesus with him and his household. The cultural and ethnic barriers are being broken as a Jew (Peter) and a Gentile (Cornelius) come into contact with one another. The God of the mission is working through His Spirit to extend the invitation into His Kingdom to all of humanity. God was already actively at work in the world, and it was the task of Peter and the early church to discern this work and to join God in it. As Newbigin further states,

At this point the church has to keep silence. It is not in control of the mission. Another is in control, and his fresh works will repeatedly surprise the church, compelling it to stop talking and to listen. Because the Spirit himself is sovereign over the mission, the church can only be the attentive servant. In sober truth the Spirit is himself the witness who goes before the church in its missionary journey.³⁸

Based on these historical accounts of the establishment of the early church in the book of Acts, and based on the Spirit's work throughout history; I would therefore conclude that the discerning of God's activity in the world throughout history should lead the Evangelical church in the west into being one that is missional and multiracial. This is because mission is concerned with nothing less than the completion of all that God has begun to do in the creation of the world and in the establishment of his church. In the American society, the discerning of God's activity in the societies, communities and neighborhoods will clearly make one aware of the cultural and ethnic diversity that is in existence in cities, workplaces, schools and neighborhoods. As I established in Chapter Two, America is rapidly becoming a diverse nation making multiculturalism unavoidable. The reason why Sunday mornings remain the most segregated time in

³⁷ Ibid, 59.

³⁸ Ibid, 61.

America is primarily because every other day seems to be more and more desegregated. Racial transition is taking place in different neighborhoods and communities all over America, and it is predicted that by 2050 there will be no clear majority group in America. The Evangelical church should therefore not resist this but seek ways to reflect such diversity in its congregation and church leadership. The missional church will be one that discerns God's activity historically and contextually and this should lead to a multiracial missional church.

The missional church movement will also challenge congregations to be multiracial because of the uniting factor or the common ground that the missional movement provides for churches of different ethnicities. All churches should seek to be missional in this contemporary postmodern culture, and this calls for all churches to discern the activity of the Spirit and the need in the communities. Whether it's the need for poverty alleviation, the fight against hunger and crime or social injustice; churches who prioritize serving the community with a missional mindset will eventually work together because of their common goal. The challenge in this contemporary culture is that institutional churches are primarily focused on growing their respective ministries and church membership. And so, the purposes of outreach and evangelism are usually to benefit their own church and not the community. A missional church, however, simply prioritizes service to the communities and neighborhoods while welcoming those who choose to join their church community.

In the book by Mark Branson and Nicholas Warnes entitled *Starting Missional Churches: Life with God in the Neighborhood* Warnes discusses some of the ways in which he feels that some of the old methods of planting and building churches will not

work in this generation. He talks of acronym called SPEC, which means Suburban sprawl, Protestant splitting, Expert strategies and Charismatic figure. Suburban sprawl is where in the mid-twentieth century churches were being built in the suburbs where people seemed to have been flocking.³⁹ Marketing strategies and other aspects of ministry advertisement were limited to people in the suburbs, whose majority was made up of white people. In a context where our communities are becoming more diversified, the “suburban sprawl” ends up being limited in its cultural engagement. Warnes also mentions how previously churches were also planted through “protestant splitting”, “expert strategies”, and “Charismatic figure”. In summary, Warnes states that church planting in this generation is primarily a work of the Spirit through a joint effort of people coming together and seeking to advance God’s kingdom in a specific context.

Mark Lau Branson engages more in the missional church conversation as a reflective on the contemporary postmodern culture and the idea that America is the new mission field. Branson believes that in this new postmodern context, the challenges and needs are different and there needs to be some sort of church transformation in order for the church to be relevant in this generation. Previously the church had been built on meeting the needs that were present during modernity, but in a sense, the church today needs to stick with the times and see how it can engage this contemporary culture. “Along the journey we will need to listen to Scripture in ways that let God’s initiatives take precedence over our consumer wants, cultural biases and institutional habits. Our definitions and practices of spirituality will focus on personal and church transformation as we learn how to major on discerning God’s grace in our communities and among

³⁹ Mark Lau Branson and Nicholas Warnes, *Starting Missional Churches: Life with God in the Neighborhood* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2014), 14.

neighbors.”⁴⁰ Warnes and Branson agree with Newbigin’s framework not only of the fact that America is the new mission field, but also on the fact that the church is a sign and a witness to the kingdom of God in the world. Branson presents a “Missional change process” which was developed by Alan Roxburgh, and it includes Awareness, Understanding, Evaluation, Experiments and Commitment. This five step process that Branson touches on emphasizes that when it comes to planting missional churches, there needs to be a lot of listening, learning and reflecting on context where the church is to be planted.

The missional church conversation makes a few key points that support my thesis for multiracial missional churches. Firstly, they emphasize listening and discerning the needs that are present in the communities and neighborhoods. Often times churches have failed to be successful in their church planting initiatives because of certain preconceived ideas and cultural biases. Many churches go into neighborhoods with a superior and colonialist mentality that simply seeks to patronize and convert people. That is why some churches will simply be involved in *niche marketing* that only finds itself appealing to a specific targeted area and audience. Missional church planting however provides an opportunity for those interested in church planting to find out more about a specific neighborhood and community. This emphasis on listening and discerning the needs in the community and society will inevitably open the churches ears to the cries of injustice and racial discrimination. As I have already established in my thesis, the race problem continues to be a problem that is prevalent in the American society. Churches that seek to be missional cannot ignore this problem as a great need in society. The awareness of this

⁴⁰ Ibid, 31.

problem should therefore lead the church into seeking racial reconciliation in its four walls and outside as well. The church has been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation and this reconciliation involves proclaiming and fighting for justice, exemplifying and proclaiming forgiveness and repentance.

Secondly, the missional church conversation provides an opportunity for multiracial missional churches because it causes the church to reevaluate itself and seek congregational transformation that will enhance its effectiveness and relevance in cultural engagement. One area of congregational transformation that the church needs to consider in order to improve its multiracial witness will be in the area of leadership. Very rarely will a church be diverse if its leadership is not diverse. The diversity of the church needs to be reflected in the church leadership. And by this I am not talking about simply hiring one or two black people in the church staff, but there needs to be a full reorientation of leadership.

In Chapter One, I discussed Willie James Jennings displacement theology as a conception that placed “whiteness” at the center of humanity, so to speak. This whiteness was seen as the chosen race and therefore justified all the colonization, imperialism and slave trade that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Because of this origin of race and racial oppression, the “New World” evolved into one that was a racialized society. White people were seen as being superior to black people. Eventually, slavery and racial oppression in America led to the establishment of black churches. However, to this very day, white or European theology and Christianity seems to set the precedence for the rest of the country. But, different theologies and Christian expressions have also emerged over the years that make claim to the fact that Christianity and Christian

theology is a global phenomenon that cannot be categorized or owned by one specific ethnic group. And it is obvious, therefore, that white Christians have just as much to learn from black Christians in America, and that black pastors are as well capable of leading and establishing multiracial churches. And so, as the missional church seeks to get involved in the neighborhoods and communities in order to meet needs such as social injustice, the missional church leadership should be diverse in its “power sharing” and authority. Black church leaders should be just as influential in the decision-making and in the construction of theology that governs and guides the church. Congregational transformation should mean a willingness to shift the power dynamics among congregation’s racial and cultural groups from one of hierarchy and dominance to one of interaction and mutuality. This task is not easy and it requires long-term persistence in order to break stereotypes and unconscious biases.⁴¹ However, the outcomes of this task can be very beneficial as it can create an openness to the movement of the Spirit. Michael Battle and Tony Campolo state in their book, *The Church Enslaved*, that accepting black leadership has its own relevance in this contemporary Postmodern culture that seeks spiritual experiences. “It is obvious that such an emerging attitude is consonant with black religion, which has always had an intensely emotional quality in its worship services.”⁴²

Young people criticize mainline white churches through the simple declaration that they find their worship services “boring.” Yet these same young people seldom, if ever, critique what happens when they attend “mainline” black churches. All of this is to suggest that the time has come for white Christians to ask themselves whether or not the time has come to welcome black church leaders

⁴¹ Charles R. Foster and Theodore Brelsford, *We Are the Church Together: Cultural Diversity in Congregational Life* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1996), 18.

⁴² Battle and Campolo, 123.

as their worship guides. Not only would this foster racial reconciliation, it just might be a major step toward the revitalization of white Christianity, especially as it exists in mainline denominationalism.⁴³

Battle and Campolo seem to be making an important point here that racial reconciliation is more than just about bringing black and white people together to form a congregation; reconciliation also includes important aspects such as repentance and what they term in the book as “restorative justice.”⁴⁴ Restorative justice is more than just holding the offender accountable for their wrongs and the crimes they’ve committed. It is about righting the wrongs and putting right the harm caused by racism and other forms of injustices. In this way, no one culture or ethnicity is to be considered a dominant group over another. Battle also incorporates the African Ubuntu philosophy in the discussion on reconciliation. In Ubuntu, community takes precedence over the individualistic thinking of the western culture. This incorporation also helps counterattack Evangelicalism’s emphasis on individualism. As we noted in Chapter One, in the book *Divided by Faith*, Emerson and Smith argued that much of the racial dysfunction in the American church today is the result of an individualized theological worldview that blinds white evangelicals to certain societal justices. It appears as though the more the American culture has become democratic and a free society, the more churches are segregated. “Freedom has come to be freedom from – freedom from oppression, freedom from discrimination, and freedom from each other.”⁴⁵ Individualism causes most white and black Christians to worship separately but it also fails to acknowledge structural evil,

⁴³ Ibid, 125.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 95-96.

⁴⁵ Emerson and Smith, 48.

reducing racial injustices to individuals' encounters and racial discriminatory behaviors. However, Tutu's Ubuntu theology in South Africa provided people with an opportunity to see how personhood was intrinsically wrapped up in each other's destinies. This communal way of understanding life based on this African spirituality helps us to recognize that black people and white people's humanities are bound up together. Christianity is to exist within community and this means coexisting with people of all races, cultures and ethnicities.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The topic of race relations in this country has been and always will be both a difficult and a delicate one for people who strive for the existence of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Beloved Community. Many ethnic groups have been plagued for centuries with the stigma of a particular race being superior, more deserving and legitimate heirs of the wealth, resources, and opportunities than other races, especially as it relates to blacks and whites. The issue of racial reconciliation has therefore been a major concern for many Evangelical leaders and theologians who have sought to make sense of biblical truths and the Christian identity in light of the race problem in America. Surveys by Evangelical sociologists such as Michael O. Emerson, Christian Smith, Tony Campolo and others have proven that racial divisions still exist within the Evangelical church. These divisions that trace their roots back to the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century in America were a result of slavery and racial oppression. The individualization of the

Evangelical thought tracing back to the 18th Century has been the cause of many white Evangelical Christians' failure to see the structural and systemic racial injustices. Whites remain ignorant of this dynamic, because they do not experience structural injustice directly themselves. However, in Chapter Three I discussed the Eschatological and Trinitarian theological implications on the beloved community and racial reconciliation. Through the concept of *Perichoresis*, I emphasized the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the trinity who rather than existing individually apart from each other, freely choose to exist in and through each other. Humanity cannot be regarded individualistically. Being a human person means being in relationship. We have our being by being in relationship. Our essential humanity will either be affirmed and honored, or denied and dishonored in these relationships. The beauty of *Perichoresis* is that it celebrates unity in diversity. "The Son and the Father are not one subject or one substance, but one in a singular unity. They are unseparated and unmixed, the existence of the one "in" the other (that is, their perichoretic unity) expresses this singular unity in the best way."⁴⁶ In relation to the beloved community and racial reconciliation, the unity of diverse peoples ought to be enriched in a way that glorifies the triune communion and the reconciling work of God in Christ.

The multiracial missional church has the potential to see fulfilled Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the beloved community, and it also has the potential of reinforcing that community to the greater American society. The multiracial missional church exemplifies what racial reconciliation and the beloved community looks like as it

⁴⁶ Moltmann, *Perichoresis*, 114.

provides to the community a sign and a witness to the coming Kingdom of God which is already present but not yet fully manifested in the world.

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