

Multiculturalism and Models of the Church, Part II

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In the 2000 publication of the *Journal of Studies on Christianity and Culture* there is Part I of *Multiculturalism and Models of the Church*. In that article I wrote about structural models of the church. One might say that I put the cart before the horse by talking about structures before process, but my intention for doing so was simply to share some of the structural models that are presently being used to support multiculturalism. That list is in no way exhausted. It is my hope that by using the process model stated below that Christian communities will develop structures that best work for them and that they will move beyond my list.

Process Model of a Multicultural Church

This process calls for a new paradigm of thinking and relating to other people, new values and attitudes. The Church is only beginning to get a picture of how this will impact the way Christian communities organize themselves in the future.

The process requires people to have a willingness to be in dialogue. According to Bailey Jackson Ed.D., Professor of Education and the Dean of the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, "to create a vision of a mul-

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ticultural system, a diversity of perspectives must be represented in a group of people who are engaged in a dialogical process..., the process of naming, reflecting, and transforming.”¹ He says that the people involved in the process are as important as the process itself. No one person can conceive of a vision of a multicultural system. It must come out of a dialogue between people of diverse views. Jackson reminds us that the process might take a long time but while it is happening, people will learn by either observing or participating in the process.

The first step in the dialogue is for those persons who have more power to be willing to listen to those who have less power. Anne Leo Ellis states this in the title of her book on multiculturalism, *First, We Must Listen* (1996). She says that each group in society needs to be heard. When a society is dominated by one culture, that group especially needs to “grapple with the issues and realities of those from other cultures.” They need to listen to those from whom they have not heard. Ellis says, “historically, this has not been popular with the dominant culture. However, for Christians who believe in the shared life of the people of God, it is exactly right.”²

Christians have a theological understanding of the unity of the people of God (John 17: 21) and a vision of that unity with diversity (Revelations 7: 9). Wherever they may live, Christians should press for this kind of community in their local church and in their society. But if Christians cannot be inclusive in their local church and be willing to listen to others who come into their congregation from other cultures, how can they suggest this way of relating with one another in their society.

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- 1 Bailey Jackson, “Coming to a Vision of a Multicultural System,” *The Promise of Diversity: Over 40 Voices Discuss Strategies for Eliminating Discrimination in Organizations* (Burr Ridge, Illinois: Irwin, 1994), 294–295.
 - 2 Anne Leo Ellis, *First, We Must Listen: Living in a Multicultural Society* (New York: Friendship Press, 1996), 125.

This is problematic for the local minority ethnic church. Ethnic minority people demand diversity in the American society and rightly so, but diversity in the ethnic church will lead to pluralism and the eventual destruction of the unity that a monoethnic unit requires for its existence. If ethnic churches remain open to people regardless of culture and race as they ought to as a church of Jesus Christ, and if their leadership is willing to honestly grapple with the issues and realities of those from other cultures, their church may be asked to change. Are ethnic churches willing to change and become more diverse?

If Christians accept the principle that the dominant culture must be willing to listen to the many voices of minorities and include them in a dialogue for the common good of all, then when ethnic minority Christians are the dominant group in their local church, are they also willing to accept the same principle, and listen to the voices of minorities in their midst? It would be ironic if the attitude of the dominant group in an ethnic church toward minorities was expressed in the following way: "You are welcome as guests but do not make any demands on us to make our church more diverse to meet your needs because this is an ethnic church."

Anne Bathurst Gilson and Barbara A. Weaver, who wrote one of the articles in the book, *First, We Must Listen*, state that most people have an ethnocentric impulse. "Emphasizing sameness has been seen as a surer—and easier—path to survival than has recognizing and living with the differences between us."³ Gilson and Weaver suggest that two primary factors involved in maintaining differences, fear and the need to control, are barriers to multiculturalism. People have fear of the unknown, fear of being asked to change, fear of possible loss of power. Control—and the fear it is based on—they say is disguised as protection of others.⁴ Some persons in the dominant culture of America want to re-

3 Ibid., 125.

4 Ibid., 96.

main in control of all institutions so they can protect the next generation. They want to pass on to the next generation the American way of life as they have come to know it. If they open to dialogue with people of other cultures they fear that their image of the American culture will change.

I can understand that most people of the dominant culture in a country may feel this same way. Japanese may not want to enter into dialogue with Koreans living in Japan because as a result Koreans may make certain demands of Japanese society that will require it to be more inclusive. Most likely there are Koreans in Korea who are very proud of their cultural tradition and would resist change if Japanese living in Korea as a minority group began to make demands. This may even bring back memories of Japanese in Korea in the first half of the twentieth century when the Japanese government, as an imperialistic power, made demands on Korea to adapt to Japanese culture, even insisting that Koreans learn the Japanese language.

When I was visiting the Philippines on a mission project in December 1995 I was speaking to a young man who was a member of a United Methodist Church in Manila that shared its facility with a Korean congregation of United Methodists. An increasing number of Korean business people and their families were coming to live in the Philippines at that time. The Filipino man told me that his church was split over the presence of the Koreans. One group was glad they were sharing the facility and receiving money contributed by the Korean group for the upkeep of the building. The Koreans were even paying for an expansion of the building. The other group did not like the Koreans presence for a number of reasons. Some resented the demands that the Korean group made on "their" church. They resented the money that the Koreans contributed to the church and the influence that this money appeared to buy. Some even went so far as to say that they did not like the fact that more and more Korean business people were coming to the Philippines. The Philippines is for the Filipino, some

said.

They also observed that the Korean United Methodists were gaining more power and influence in the United Methodist Church in the Philippines. My question to this young man was, if it is all right for Filipino United Methodist to come to the United States and be represented in United Methodist conferences there, ought it not be right for Korean United Methodists to go to the Philippines and be represented in decision making organizations in his country?

Gilson and Weaver say that we must push open the question of what is "normal," and what is considered "normative." The dominant culture must no longer hold a monopoly on what is normative. In principle, this should be true for all countries, even if they are considered monoethnic (no country is one hundred percent monoethnic), as it is true with the multiethnic country of the United States. Gilson and Weaver state that "taking seriously the particularities of our lives, the differences between us, must mean that no one particularity should ever be considered normative. The aim is not for sameness. Rather, difference is approached as a gift, an opportunity to change."⁵ In principle, this is as true for ethnic minority local churches as it is true for European American churches.

The New Testament offers people a process to move beyond these barriers to multiculturalism. Fear is conquered by the grace of God. The need to control is overcome by humility. The ethnocentric impulse is relieved by the vision of the kingdom of God that is multicultural and multiracial. Jesus gives all Christians the ministry to be in dialogue with others and especially to listen to those who have less power. Jesus Christ and the New Testament as demonstrated in chapter IV offer a bases to proceed toward a multicultural community. Gilson and Weaver say that we Christians "need to take more time to reflect on the gaps

5 Ibid., 98.

between what we believe and what we do. When we connect both our formal, professed theology and our day-to-day lived theology (practice), when we truly respect the differences between us, when we form one body and as parts of it belong to each other, then our mosaic survives and thrives.”⁶

As Paul wrote, “Just as each of our bodies has several parts and each part has a separate function, so all of us, in union with Christ, *form one body and as part of it we belong to each other.*” (Romans 12: 4–6)⁷

In the book, *The Promise of Diversity: Over 40 Voices Discuss Strategies for Eliminating Discrimination in Organizations*, there are a number of suggestions for building multicultural relations by professional consultants in the field of business. Businesses tend to take this issue more seriously than the Church. “The business world faces lawsuits if they fail to address issues of diversity.”⁸ That is certainly one incentive to change, but I would hope that Christians would recognize that valuing diversity is the will of God and that this would be their incentive to change.

According to one of the consultants, Marilyn Loden, valuing diversity is a new paradigm for managing people. The key is for people to value diversity and not simply tolerate it. Loden says that among the many changes required to support diversity, none is more fundamental than a change in assumptions about the importance of differences.

Historically, throughout the U.S. workplace, most managers minimized the importance that core differences such as age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities, race, and sexual orientation played in shaping assumptions, expectations, and behavior. Instead of viewing cultural differences as the key to greater innovation, diversity was viewed as a liability, something to be suppressed.

6 Ibid., 97.

7 Ibid., 100.

8 Brenda Salter McNeil, “What Black Christians Want White Christians to Know: The Issue is Power.” *World Vision*, February-March, 1996, 16.

Today, U.S. institutions and their management teams are finally recognizing that basic human differences make a powerful difference in the ways people relate to each other and their environments. It is this acknowledgment of the importance of core differences in shaping assumptions, expectations, and behavior that is leading to a paradigm shift in the ways managers deal with people issues.⁹

This is a direct challenge to most mainline Protestant churches in the United States. Just as European American churches in culturally and racially diverse communities were being challenged to integrate there sprang up a church growth movement that supported monoethnic churches. This movement claims that churches where everyone is similar have a better chance of growing numerically than diverse congregations. Consequently, they say evangelistic efforts should be focused on one's own kind. Not only have some European American churches bought into this to justify keeping with their own people, but ethnic minority congregations believe this is better for their growth too.

On the contrary, Frederick Miller, president of the Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group, Inc., states from a business perspective that "in today's rapidly changing world, monoculturalism has become obsolete. It is simply too costly, wasteful and limiting. He says:

The assembly-line, mass-production manufacturing methods of the early twentieth century fostered monoculturalism and vice versa. Today's trends toward micro production, product customization, and niche marketing demand diversity. "Any color you want, as long as it's black" —the saying associated with the Ford Model T—has given way to "Any color you want, when you want it, in any size or shape you want it in." Diversity in the marketplace requires diversity of the work force, both to perceive the differing demands of niche groups and to supply the energetic creativity re-

9 Marilyn Loden, "Diversity Management: The Challenge of Change," *The Promise of Diversity*, 294–295.

quired to meet all the various demands.¹⁰

Consultant Deborah Yarborough agrees. She says that companies with an increasingly diverse customer base are looking for marketing, service, and sales of products that suit individual tastes, needs, and styles. When there is competition it is no surprise that if customers are not listened to and their needs are not being met they will take their business elsewhere. This is also true for the Church. To some extent the United Methodist Church has been trying to address the need for diversity in the United States by supporting ethnic minority local churches and developing culturally diverse curriculum for Christian Education. The reason for doing this is not simply for increased membership but because the denomination believes that it is the right thing to do.

Developing ethnic churches is part of the process of creating a multicultural Church. For a denomination such as the United Methodist Church in the United States that is ninety-five percent European American, developing ethnic churches is a step in the process of diversifying the denomination. Membership in an ethnic church may also be a first step toward belonging to a multicultural denomination for new ethnic minority immigrants who came from societies and church denominations that are monoethnic. But in time immigrants and even the ethnic church they belong to should make the transformation to a multicultural congregation. The only reason their church would not transform into a multicultural congregation, and this is the same justification that European Americans might have for maintaining a white church, is if the area where the church exists is not multicultural.

For the last generation many European American local churches have been recognizing the fact that in their increasingly diverse communities they need to

10 Frederick Miller, "Forks in the Road: Critical Issues on the Road to Diversity," *The Promise of Diversity*, 39.

change and be more inclusive. This means having ministries that meet the needs of a diverse population. This means becoming multicultural like the famous Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco. If that church had continued to see its mission only serving middle class European American people it would probably have died thirty years ago. Instead, the congregation set its mind to valuing diversity and consequently, it has grown immensely in numbers and in spirit.

Frederick Miller advises that organizations develop a mind set of inclusion rather than exclusion. Sadly to say some churches have defined themselves in terms of exclusivity. Some Christian communities through the centuries have actually physically separated themselves from the world. Many ethnic churches are based on the principle of exclusion. Some justify this for reasons of survival. If the ethnic church in a diverse society became inclusive then they may eventually cease to exist as an ethnic church. But is the church existing for survival or to evangelize the world?

A question that I labored with while serving as the pastor of a Filipino United Methodist Church in Oakland, California, is how could we say to our African American neighbors that our church was for Filipinos? Certainly if one or two African Americans showed up on Sunday morning (which occasionally happened) they would be warmly welcomed but I dare say that if they came in droves and became members and leaders of the church, this would have been problematic for the Filipino congregation. It seemed that the Filipinos never had to fear this happening, because the nonverbal message the congregation gave to their African American neighbors was that the church had nothing to offer them. After thirty-two years in this neighborhood the congregation finally moved to another city in 2001.

Accepting the concept of inclusion was too challenging for most of the people at Melrose UMC. Miller says that human beings in most cultures have been

trained to be suspicious of people who are different, to avoid strangers, and to “stick with their own kind.”

Exclusive has come to mean desirable and comfortable, as in exclusive clubs, exclusive schools, exclusive neighborhoods. But exclusion breeds sameness. Members of exclusive groups tend to talk alike, dress alike, even walk alike. They agree on virtually all important issues. Their norms and values are static.

Inclusive groups thrive on difference. They seek out different points of view so they can assess situations from every angle. They see cultural diversity not as something to be avoided or tolerated but as a necessity for success. Inclusive groups encourage disagreement because they realize it leads to more effective solutions and more successful adaptations to a changing environment.¹¹

Monocultural groups resist change, but this is exactly the environment that most local churches have created for themselves. In many areas of the United States today monoculturalism does not reflect the society at large. Much of the United States is experiencing a changing social environment. It seems to me that not only denominations should move in the direction of multiculturalism but local churches should also embrace multiculturalism. Not only should the denominational leadership choose change over comfort but the local church must also let go of old assumptions, traditions, and practices even though they offer comfort.

Much of the burden lies on pastors, the middle managers of the church. They must offer leadership for this new vision, but even they might find it difficult to change. Marilyn Loden says that “despite the desire to change the culture, managers are often reluctant to give up the ‘knowns’ and embrace the new and un-

¹¹ Ibid., 39.

tested. Unless they recognize this dilemma and work against the human tendency to choose comfort over change, their own socialization will restrict their ability to innovate and manage diversity as an asset."¹²

According to Jan Magruder Watkins, a consultant with over twenty-five years of experience in organizational development and training, "it is already too late for those who cling to an illusion of 'racial purity' and national identity."¹³ She does not say this to shock or upset, but as a statement of fact. In other words, she says, wake up to reality, it is already a multicultural world all around us. According to many of the consultants in the book, *The Promise of Diversity*, it is to the best interest of organizations to accept this fact and change their way of thinking. By proceeding out of this new paradigm of diversity the Church discovers new ways to organize itself in this multicultural world. Ms. Watkins asks people to imagine such a world where people work together across all the lines of race, gender, and ethnicity. She offers the following process model.

The issue is no longer how to "fix" organizations that allow or enable oppression and injustice; rather, it is to grow new, and renew, organizations on the foundation of valuing diversity.¹⁴

Judith Katz Ed.D., who has focused her twenty year career in organizational development on linking strategic initiatives with diversity efforts, says that some people "may suspect there's something wrong with traditional structures of power and privilege based on one-up and one-down relationship (dominant-subordinate), but they cannot imagine alternatives."¹⁵ Like Watkins, Katz invites people to imagine that there can be a world (or a nation, a community, a church) without oppression. This is a challenge for ethnic churches as well as

12 Loden, "Diversity Management," 294.

13 June Magruder Watkins, "The Future is Now," *The Promise of Diversity*, 225.

14 Ibid., 227.

15 Judith H. Katz, "Walking Toward Our Talk," *The Promise of Diversity*, 207.

European American churches. Even though ethnic culture is to be affirmed, it is not exempt from a social justice critique against racism, sexism and ageism. Ethnic groups must be careful about being in a state of denial regarding oppression in their own culture. Jesus said we must be careful that we not become so preoccupied with our pointing out the splinter in our neighbor's eye that we forget the splinter (maybe even a log) in our own eye? Katz says organizations of all cultures need a new model to replace the old oppressive hierarchical model of power and privilege. She offers the following creative process for imagining this.

We have to start by imagining a positive, not a negative. Not the absence of oppression but the presence of appreciation. Not the absence of exclusion and exploitation but the presence of inclusion and contribution. Not what we might lose, but what we might gain. We need to know where we want to go, not just what we want to leave behind. We must see the advantage of the journey. We have to envision not just something that works, but something that works *better*.¹⁶

Marilyn Loden suggests a process that values integration over assimilation. People with an assimilation mind set deal with diversity with the assumption that those who are different than they are suppose to "fit in." Emphasis is on helping those outside the dominant culture to learn the existing rules in order to achieve full membership. Though assimilationists may be interested in increasing diversity they are reluctant to give up the old assumptions that define appropriate behavior. Loden says:

This desire for visible diversity, then, becomes more symbolic than real. Instead of adding new zest to organizational life, the perspectives of those outside the mainstream remain outside, even as more people from diverse

16 Ibid., 208.

cultural backgrounds move in. Despite demographic changes that occur, no new models of leadership, teamwork, or process innovation emerge as a result of this change. Instead, people of diverse cultural backgrounds participate and prosper by adopting the styles, values, and standards previously established by those in the mainstream.¹⁷

Thomas Kockman Ph.D., professor emeritus of communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago and president of Kochman Communication Consultants, suggests that from a multicultural perspective the Golden Rule be reinterpreted. The traditional expression “do unto others as you would have done unto you” (which assumes that others want for themselves what you want for yourself) needs to be refashioned to “do unto others as they would want done unto them.”¹⁸ If Christians used this new way of understanding the Golden Rule as a moral guide perhaps the way they structure themselves as the church might radically change. The focus moves from ourselves to others.

This change of focus is also expressed in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3–11). In this litany of blessings Jesus affirms the attitude necessary to create a multicultural community. He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” In other words, the way of God requires that we be humble. Poverty of spirit is defined as “the opposite of pride, self-righteousness and conceit; the spirit of the Publican rather than of the Pharisee; the spirit of those that wish to learn rather than to teach, to obey rather than to command, and are willing to become as little children in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”¹⁹

Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” According to John Hoyland, in his book *The Race Problem and the Teaching of Jesus Christ*, Christians need to

17 Loden, “Diversity Management,” 296–297.

18 Thomas Kochman, “Black and White Cultural Styles in Pluralistic Perspective,” *The Promise of Diversity*, 198.

19 John Roberts Dummeow, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1909), 639.

empathize with those who are different, especially the oppressed. This may include a genuine sharing in the sufferings of others. *Agape* love, the love of Christ, enable us to mourn with those who mourn.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek." The ambassador of racial reconciliation must be "meek," genuinely willing to take the position of subordinate. Multiculturalism stresses equality and rightly so, but according to the example of Christ, those who have had the power must learn for a while to be the servant of those who have not had power.

And as for the blessing of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Hoyland suggests that Christians be less anxious about the morals of others, and consider more their own life-long desire for righteousness. Christ warns against self-righteousness and the thought that one has already arrived in the Kingdom of God. Some congregations think that they have already arrived and consequently, become relaxed and no longer hunger and thirst for righteousness in their relations with others.

"Blessed are the merciful." This means having the mind of God and to forgive. Patience and mercy is the key to healthy human relations. Multicultural relations are not easy. There are usually more opportunities to make mistakes and to offend when people relate to someone different than themselves than when they relate to someone similar. But if a multicultural community will develop the attitude of forgiveness toward one another people will be more willing to do the hard work of truth-saying that is necessary for relationships to grow.

"Blessed are the pure in heart." This is a naive view not taken seriously today. People have become hardened in their opinion of humanity. They become injured in their relations with people of other cultures or races and they run back to their own camps. This idea of purity of heart challenges people not to imagine evil in another person although at the same time, not to gloss over sin. It is an optimism grounded in the belief that God's love can redeem all relations.

Hoyland lifts up Christ's enthusiasm for humanity—"his ability to hope against hope, and to believe against proof, in the essential goodness and loveliness of people with whom he dealt."²⁰

"Blessed are the peacemakers." Above all, says Hoyland, the heralds of reconciliation must be a 'peace-maker': not only in the sense that he or she must be constantly at work for the mitigation of racial antagonisms; not only in the sense that he or she must endeavor perpetually to bring together clashing interests, to patch up quarrels, to break down barriers of class, language, nationality and race; but in a deeper sense also. A peace-maker must be possessed by a passion for unity among humankind and between humankind and God.²¹

If more lives were confirmed to the ideals of Christ's beatitudes, a new way of structuring the Church might evolve; a new way of organizing the people of God might result from a dialogue where diversity is valued; and in this new multicultural process Christians might find themselves returning to the old vision of the kingdom of God.

20 John Somervell Hoyland, *The Race Problem and the Teaching of Jesus Christ* (London: The Religion Tract Society, 1925), 189.

21 *Ibid.*, 194-195.